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THE NOVELS, TALES AND LETTERS
OF
PROSPER MÉRIMÉE

EDITED BY PROF. GEORGE SAINTSBURY, M.A.

COMPLETE IN EIGHT VOLUMES

# LAST STORIES

## AND TRANSLATIONS

Translated by
EMILY MARY WALLER AND
LOUISE PAUL

With Illustrations by
A. ROBAUDI

NEW YORK PHILADELPHIA

FRANK S. HOLBY

MCMVI

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# LOKIS

FROM THE MS. OF PROFESSOR WITTEMBACH

# LOKIS

## I

"THÉODORE," said Professor Wittembach, "please give me that manuscript-book, bound in parchment, which is laid on the second shelf above my writing-desk—no, not that one, but the small octavo volume. I copied all the notes of my journal of 1866 in it—at least those that relate to Count Szémioth."

The Professor put on his glasses, and, amid profound silence, read the following:—

"LOKIS,"

with this Lithuanian proverb as a motto:

"Miszka su Lokiu,
Abu du tokiu."*

When the first translation of the Holy Scriptures into the Lithuanian language appeared in

* "The two together make a pair"; word for word, Michon (Michael) with Lokis, both are the same. *Michaelium cum Lokide, ambo* [*duo*] *ipsissimi.*

London, I published in the *Scientific and Literary Gazette* of Koenigsberg, an article wherein, while rendering full justice to the efforts of the learned interpreter and to the pious motives of the Bible Society, I pointed out several slight errors, and showed, moreover, that this version could only be useful to one portion of the Lithuanian people.

Indeed, the dialect from which they translated is hardly intelligible to the inhabitants of the districts where the Jomaïtic tongue, commonly called Jmoudic, is spoken, namely, in the Palatinate of Samogitia. This language is, perhaps, nearer akin to the Sanskrit than to High Lithuanian. In spite of the furious criticisms which this observation drew down upon me from a certain well-known professor of the Dorpat University, it so far enlightened the members of the Committee of the Bible Society that they lost no time in making me a flattering offer to direct and supervise an edition of the Gospel of St. Matthew into Samogitian. I was too much occupied at the time with my researches in Trans-Uralian dialects to undertake a more extended work comprising all four of the Gospels. Deferring my marriage with Mlle. Gertrude Weber, I went to Kowno (*Kaunas*) for the purpose of collecting all the linguistic records, whether

printed or in MSS., of Jmoudic, that I could lay hands on. I did not overlook, of course, old ballads (*daïnos*), tales, or legends (*pasakos*) which would furnish me with material for a Jomaïtic vocabulary, a work which must necessarily precede that of translation.

I had been given a letter of introduction to the young Count Michel Szémioth, whose father, I was told, had come into the possession of the famous *Catechismus Samogiticus* of Father Lawiçki. It was so rare that its very existence had been disputed, particularly by the Dorpat professor to whom allusion has been already made. In his library I should find, according to the information given me, an old collection of *daïnos,* besides ballads in old Prussian. Having written to Count Szémioth to lay the object of my visit before him, I received a most courteous invitation to spend as much time at his Castle of Médintiltas as my researches might need. He ended his letter by very gracefully saying that he prided himself upon speaking Jmoudic almost as well as his peasants, and would be only too pleased to help me in what he termed so important and interesting an undertaking. Besides being one of the wealthiest landowners in Lithuania, he was of the same evangelical faith of which I had the honour to

be a minister. I had been warned that the Count was not without a certain peculiarity of character, but he was very hospitable, especially towards all who had intellectual tastes. So I set out on my journey to Médintiltas.

At the Castle steps I was met by the Count's steward, who immediately led me to the rooms prepared for me.

"M. le Comte," he said, "is most sorry not to be able to dine with you to-day. He has a bad headache, a malady he is unfortunately subject to. If you do not prefer to dine in your room you can dine with the Countess's doctor, Dr. Froeber. Dinner will be ready in an hour; do not trouble to dress for it. If you have any orders to give, there is the bell."

He withdrew, making me a profound salute.

The room was of immense size, comfortably furnished, and decorated with mirrors and gilding. One side of it looked out upon a garden, or rather the park belonging to the Castle, and the other upon the principal entrance. Notwithstanding the statement that there was no need to dress, I felt obliged to get my black coat out of my trunk, and was in my shirt-sleeves busy unpacking my simple luggage when the sound of carriage wheels attracted me to the window which looked on the court. A handsome ba-

rouche had just come in. It contained a lady in black, a gentleman, and a woman dressed in the Lithuanian peasant costume, but so tall and strong-looking that at first I took her for a man in disguise. She stepped out first; two other women, not less robust in appearance, were already standing on the steps. The gentleman leant over the lady dressed in black, and, to my great surprise, unbuckled a broad leather belt which held her to her seat in the carriage. I noticed that this lady had long white hair, very much dishevelled, and that her large, wide-opened eyes were vacant in expression. She looked like a waxen figure. After having untied her, her companion spoke to her very respectfully, hat in hand; but she appeared not to pay the slightest attention to him. He then turned to the servants and made a slight sign with his head. Immediately the three women took hold of the lady in black, lifted her out as though she were a feather, and carried her into the Castle, in spite of her efforts to cling to the carriage. The scene was witnessed by several of the house servants, who did not appear to think it anything extraordinary.

The gentleman who had directed the proceedings drew out his watch, and asked how soon dinner would be ready.

"In a quarter of an hour, doctor," was the reply.

I guessed at once that this was Dr. Froeber, and that the lady in black was the Countess. From her age I concluded she was the mother of Count Szémioth, and the precautionary measures taken concerning her told me clearly enough that her reason was affected.

Some moments later the doctor himself came to my room.

"As the Count is indisposed," he said to me, "I must introduce myself to you. I am Dr. Froeber, at your service, and I am delighted to make the acquaintance of a savant known to all readers of the *Scientific and Literary Gazette* of Koenigsberg. Have you been properly waited on?"

I replied to his compliments as well as I could, and told him that if it was time to go down to dinner I was ready to accompany him.

When we were in the dining-hall, a major-domo brought us liqueurs and several piquant and highly spiced dishes on a silver salver to induce appetite, after a northern custom.

"Allow me, sir, in my office as doctor, to recommend a glass of that *starka,* a true Cognac brandy casked forty years ago. It is a queen of liqueurs. Take a Drontheim anchovy; nothing

is better for opening and preparing the digestive organs, the most important functions of the body. . . . And now to table. Why do we not speak in German? You come from Koenigsberg, I from Memel; but I took my degree at Jéna. We shall be more at ease in that way, and the servants, who only know Polish and Russian, will not understand us."

We ate at first in silence; then, after having taken our first glass of Madeira, I inquired of the doctor if the Count were often inconvenienced by the indisposition which deprived us of his presence that night.

"Yes and no," was the doctor's answer. "It depends upon what expeditions he takes."

"How so?"

"When he takes the road to Rosienie, for instance, he comes back with headache and in a savage temper."

"I have been to Rosienie myself without such an experience."

"It depends, Professor," he replied, laughing, "on whether you are in love."

I sighed, thinking of Mlle. Gertrude Weber.

"Does the Count's *fiancée,* then, live at Rosienie?" I said.

"Yes, in that neighbourhood; but I can not say whether she is affianced to him. She is a

real flirt, and will drive him off his head, so that he will be in his mother's state."

"Indeed, then her ladyship is . . . an invalid?"

"She is mad, my dear sir, mad; and I was even madder to come here!"

"Let us hope that your able attentions will restore her to reason."

The doctor shook his head, and looked attentively at the colour of the glass of Bordeaux which he held in his hand.

"The man you see before you, Professor, was once surgeon-major in the Kalouga regiment. At Sevastopol we cut off arms and legs from morning till night; not to speak of bombs which came down among us as thick as flies on a galled horse. But, though I was then ill-lodged and ill-fed, I was not so bored as I am here, where I eat and drink of the best, am lodged like a prince, and paid like a Court physician. . . . But liberty, my dear sir! . . . As you can guess, with this she-dragon I have not a moment to call my own."

"Has she been under your care for long?"

"Less than two years; but she has been insane at least twenty-seven, since before the birth of the Count. Did no one tell you this either at Rosienie or Kowno? Listen, then, for it is

a case on which I should like some day to write an article for the *Medical Journal* of St. Petersburg. She went mad from fear. . . ."

"From fear? How was such a thing possible?"

"She had a fright. She is of the house of Keystut. . . . Oh, there are no *mésalliances* in this house. We descend from the Gédymin. . . . Well, Professor, two or three days after her marriage, which took place in the castle where we are dining (I drink to your health . . .), the Count, the father of the present one, went out hunting. Our Lithuanian ladies are regular amazons, you know. The Countess accompanied him to the hunt. . . . She stayed behind, or got in advance of the huntsmen, . . . I do not know which, . . . when, all at once, the Count saw the Countess's little Cossack, a lad of twelve or fourteen, come up at full gallop.

"'Master!' he said, 'a bear has carried off the Countess.'

"'Where?' cried the Count.

"'Over there,' replied the boy-Cossack.

"All the hunt ran towards the spot he pointed out, but no Countess was to be seen. Her strangled horse lay on one side, and on the other her lambswool cloak. They searched and

beat the wood on all sides. At last a huntsman cried out, 'There is the bear!' and, sure enough, the bear crossed a clearing, dragging the Countess, no doubt for the purpose of devouring her undisturbed, into a thicket, for these beasts are great gourmands; they like to dine at ease, as the monks. Married but a couple of days, the Count was most chivalrous. He tried to fling himself upon the bear, hunting knife in his fist; but, my dear sir, a Lithuanian bear does not let himself be run through like a stag. By good fortune the Count's gun-bearer, a queer, low fellow, so drunk that morning as to be unable to tell a rabbit from a hare, fired his rifle, more than a hundred paces off, without taking care whether the bullet hit the beast or the lady. . . ."

"And he killed the bear?"

"Stone dead. It takes a tipsy man to hit like that. There are also predestined bullets, Professor. There are sorcerers here who sell them at a moderate price. . . . The Countess was terribly torn, unconscious, of course, and had one leg broken. They carried her home, and she recovered consciousness, but her reason had gone. They took her to St. Petersburg for a special consultation of four doctors, who glittered with orders. They said that Madam was enceinte, and that a favourable turn might be

expected after her delivery. She was to be kept in fresh air in the country, and given whey and codéine. Each physician received about a hundred roubles. Nine months later the Countess gave birth to a fine, healthy boy, but where was the 'favourable turn'? Ah, yes, indeed . . . there was nothing but redoubled frenzy. The Count showed her her son. In novels that never fails to produce a good effect. 'Kill it! kill the beast!' she yelled; a little longer, and she would have wrung his neck. Ever since there have been phases of stupid imbecility, alternating with violent mania. There is a strong suicidal tendency. We are obliged to strap her down to make her take fresh air, and it takes three strong servants to hold her in. Nevertheless, Professor, I ask you to note this fact, when I have exhausted my Latin on her without making her obey me, I have a resort that quietens her. I threaten to cut off her hair. I fancy she must have had very beautiful hair at one time. Vanity! It is the sole human feeling left. Is it not odd? If I could experiment upon her as I chose, I might perhaps be able to cure her."

"By what method?"

"By thrashing her. I cured in that way twenty peasant women in a village where the

terrible Russian madness (the *hurlement* *) had broken out. One woman begins to howl, then her companion follows, and in three days' time the whole village is howling mad. I put an end to it by flogging them. (Take a little chicken, it is very tender.) The Count would never allow me to try the experiment."

"What! you wanted him to consent to your atrocious treatment?"

"Oh, he had known his mother so little, and besides it was for her good; but tell me, Professor, have you ever held that fear could drive anyone mad?"

"The Countess's situation was frightful . . . to find herself in the claws of a savage beast!"

"All the same, her son does not take after her. A year ago he was in exactly the same predicament, but, thanks to his coolness, he had a marvellous escape."

"From the claws of a bear?"

"A she-bear, the largest seen for some time. The Count wanted to attack her, boar-spear in hand, but with one back stroke she parried the blade, clutched the Count, and felled him to the ground as easily as I could upset this bottle. He

* The Russian for one possessed is "a howler"; *klikoucha*, the root of which is *klik*, clamour, howling.

cunningly feigned death. . . . The bear smelt and sniffed him, then, instead of tearing him to pieces, she gave him a lick with her tongue. He had the presence of mind not to move, and she went on her way."

"She thought that he was dead. I have been told that these animals will not eat a dead body."

"We will endeavour to believe that is so, and abstain from making personal investigation of the question. But, apropos of fear, let me tell you what happened at Sevastopol. Five or six of us were sitting behind the ambulance of the famous bastion No. 5, round a pot of beer which had been brought us. The sentry cried, 'A shell!' and we all lay flat on our stomachs. No, not all of us: a fellow named . . . but it is not necessary to give his name . . . a young officer who had just come to us, remained standing up, holding his glass full, just when the shell burst. It carried off the head of my poor comrade André Speranski, a brave lad, and broke the pitcher, which, fortunately, was nearly empty. When we got up after the explosion we saw, in the midst of the smoke, that our friend had swallowed his last mouthful of beer just as though nothing had happened. We dubbed him a hero. The following day I met

Captain Ghédéonof coming out of the hospital. 'I dine with you fellows to-day,' he said, 'and to celebrate my return I will stand the champagne.' We sat down to the table, and the young officer of the beer was there. He did not wait for the champagne. A bottle was being uncorked near him, and fizz! the cork hit him on the temple. He uttered a cry and fainted away. Believe me, my hero had been devilishly afraid the first time, and his drinking the beer instead of getting out of the way showed that he had lost the control of his mind, and only unconscious mechanical movements remained to him. Indeed, Professor, the human mechanism——"

"Sir," said a servant who had just come into the room, "Jdanova says that the Countess will not take her food."

"Devil take her!" growled the doctor. "I must go to her. When I have made my she-dragon eat, Professor, if agreeable to you, we will take a hand at *préférence* or at *douratchki*."

I expressed my regret that I was ignorant of the games, and, when he had gone to see the invalid, I went up to my room and wrote to Mlle. Gertrude.

## II

It was a warm night, and I had left open the window overlooking the park. I did not feel

ready for sleep after I finished my letter, so I set to work to rehearse the irregular Lithuanian verbs, and to look into Sanskrit to find the origins of their different irregularities. In the middle of my absorbing labours a tree close to my window shook violently. I could hear the dead branches creak, and it seemed as though some heavy animal were trying to climb it. Still engrossed with the bear stories that the doctor had told me, I got up, feeling rather uneasy, and saw, only a few feet from my window, a human head among the leaves of the tree, lit up plainly by the light from my lamp. The vision only lasted a second, but the singular brilliance of the eyes which met my gaze struck me more than I could say. Involuntarily I took a step backwards; then I ran to the window and demanded in severe tones what the intruder wanted. Meanwhile he climbed down quickly, and, seizing a large branch between both hands, he swung himself off, jumped to the ground, and was soon out of sight. I rang the bell and told the adventure to a servant who answered it.

"Sir," he said, "you must be mistaken."

"I am certain of what I tell you," I replied. "I am afraid there is a burglar in the park."

"It is impossible, sir."

"Well, then, is it someone out of the house?"

The servant opened his eyes wide without replying, and in the end asked me if I wanted anything. I told him to fasten my window, and I went to bed.

I slept soundly, neither dreaming of bears nor of thieves. In the morning, while I was dressing, someone knocked at my door. I opened it and found myself face to face with a very tall and finely built young man in a Bokhara dressing-gown, holding in his hand a long Turkish pipe.

"I come to beg your pardon, Professor," he said, "for having welcomed such a distinguished guest so badly. I am Count Szémioth."

I hastened to say that, on the contrary, my humble thanks were due to him for his most courteous hospitality, and inquired if he had lost his headache.

"Very nearly," he said. "At all events, until the next crisis," he added, with a melancholy expression. "Are you comfortable here? You must not forget that you are among barbarians; it would be difficult to think otherwise in Samogitia."

I assured him I was most comfortably entertained. All the time I was speaking I could not prevent myself from studying him with a very impolite curiosity; there was something strange

in his look which reminded me, in spite of myself, of the man whom I had seen climbing the tree the night before. . . .

"But what probability," I said to myself, "is there that Count Szémioth would climb trees by night?"

His forehead was high and well-developed, although rather narrow. His features were large and regular, but his eyes were too close together, and I did not think that, measured from one lachrymal gland to the other, there was the width of an eye, the canon of Greek sculptors. His glance was piercing. Our eyes met several times, in spite of ourselves, and we looked at each other with some embarrassment. All at once the Count burst out laughing.

"You recognise me!" he said.

"Recognise you?"

"Yes, you detected me yesterday playing a scoundrelly part."

"Oh! Monsieur le Comte!"

"I had passed a suffering day shut up in my bedroom. As I was somewhat better at night I went for a walk in the garden. I saw your light and yielded to curiosity. . . . I ought to have told you who I was, and introduced myself properly, but I was in such a ridiculous situation. . . . I was ashamed, and so I fled.

. . . Will you excuse me for having disturbed you in the midst of your work?"

He said all this with a would-be playful air; but he blushed, and was evidently confused. I did my best to reassure him that I did not retain any unpleasant impression from our first interview, and, to change the subject, I asked him if he really possessed the Samogitic Catechism of Father Lawiçki.

"It may be so; but, to tell you the truth, I do not know much about my father's library. He loved old and rare books. I hardly read anything beyond modern works; but we will look for it, Professor. You wish us, then, to read the Gospel in Jmoudic?"

"Do you not consider, M. le Comte, that a translation of the Scriptures into the language of this country is very desirable?"

"Certainly; nevertheless, if you will permit me a slight remark, I can tell you that amongst the people who know no other language than the Jmoudic, there is not a single person who can read."

"Perhaps so, but I ask permission of Your Excellency * to point out that the greatest obstacle in the way of learning to read is the absence of books. When the Samogitic countries

* *Siatelstvo*, "Your *shining light*"; the title used in addressing a count.

have a printed text they will wish to read it, and will learn to read. This has already happened in the case of many savage races . . . not that I wish to apply such a term to the people of this country. . . . Furthermore," I went on, "is it not a deplorable thing that a language should disappear, leaving no trace behind? Prussian became a dead language thirty years ago, and the last person who knew Cornic died the other day."

"Sad," interrupted the Count. "Alexander Humboldt told my father he had met with a parrot in America that was the only living thing which knew several words of the language of a tribe now entirely wiped out by small-pox. Will you allow me to order our tea here?"

While we drank tea the conversation turned upon the Jmoudic tongue. The Count found fault with the way Germans print Lithuanian, and he was right.

"Your alphabet," he said, "does not lend itself to our language. You have neither our J, nor our L, Y, or Ë. I have a collection of *daïnos* published last year at Koenigsberg, and I had immense trouble to understand the words, they are so queerly formed."

"Your Excellency probably speaks of Lessner's *daïnos?*"

"Yes, it is very vapid poetry, do you not think?"

"He might perhaps have selected better. I admit that, as it is, this collection has but a purely philological interest; but I believe if careful search were made one would succeed in collecting the most perfect flowers of your folk-poetry."

"Alas! I doubt it very much, in spite of my patriotic desires."

"A few weeks ago a very fine ballad was given me at Wilno—an historical one. . . . It is a most remarkable poem. . . . May I read it? I have it in my bag."

"With the greatest pleasure."

He buried himself in an armchair, after asking permission to smoke.

"I can't understand poetry unless I smoke," he said.

"It is called *The Three Sons of Boudrys.*"

"*The Three Sons of Boudrys?*" exclaimed the Count with a gesture of surprise.

"Yes, Boudrys, as Your Excellency knows better than I, is an historic character."

The Count looked at me fixedly with that odd gaze of his. It was something indefinable, both timid and ferocious, and produced an almost painful impression until one grew accustomed to it. I hurriedly began to read to escape it.

"THE THREE SONS OF BOUDRYS.

"In the courtyard of his castle old Boudrys called together his three sons—three genuine Lithuanians like himself.

"'My children,' he said to them, 'feed your war horses, and get ready your saddles; sharpen your swords and your javelins. It is said that at Wilno war has broken out between the three quarters of the globe. Olgerd will march against Russia; Skirghello against our neighbours, the Poles; Keystut will fall upon the Teutons.* You are young, strong and bold; go and fight; and may the gods of Lithuania protect you! This year I shall not go to war, but I wish to counsel you. There are three of you, and three roads are open to you.

"'One of you must accompany Olgerd to Russia, to the borders of Lake Ilmen, under the walls of Novgorod. Ermine skins and embroidered stuffs you will find there in plenty, and among the merchants as many roubles as there are blocks of ice in the river.

"'The second must follow Keystut in his incursion. May he scatter the cross-bearing rabble! Amber is there as common as is the sea sand; their cloths are without equal for sheen

* The knights of the Teutonic order.

and colour; their priests' vestments are ornamented with rubies.

"'The third shall cross the Niémen with Skirghello. On the other side he will find base implements of toil. He must choose good lances and strong bucklers to oppose them, and he will bear away a daughter-in-law.

"'The women of Poland, my sons, are the most beautiful of all our captives—sportive as kittens and as white as cream. Under their black brows their eyes sparkle like stars. When I was young, half a century ago, I brought away captive from Poland a beautiful girl who became my wife. She has long been dead, but I can never look at her side of the hearth without remembering her.'

"He blessed the youths, who already were armed and in the saddle. They set out. Autumn came, then winter . . . but they did not come back, and the old Boudrys believed them to be dead.

"There came a snowstorm, and a horseman drew near, who bore under his black bourka * a precious burden.

"'Is it a sackful of roubles from Novgorod?' asked Boudrys.

"'No, father. I am bringing you a daughter-in-law from Poland.'

* Felt cloak.

"In the midst of the snowstorm another horseman appeared. His bourka was also distended with a precious burden.

"'What have you, my child; yellow amber from Germany?'

"'No, father. I bring you a daughter-in-law from Poland.'

"The snow fell in squalls. A horseman advanced hiding a precious burden under his bourka. . . . But before he had shown his spoil Boudrys had invited his friends to a third wedding."

"Bravo! Professor," cried the Count; "you pronounce Jmoudic to perfection. But who told you this pretty *daïna?*"

"A young lady whose acquaintance I had the honour to make at Wilno, at the house of Princess Katazyna Paç."

"What is her name?"

"The *panna* Iwinska."

"Mlle. Ioulka!"* exclaimed the Count. "The little madcap! I might have guessed it. My dear Professor, you know Jmoudic and all the learned tongues; you have read every old book, but you have let yourself be taken in by a young girl who has only read novels. She has translated to you, more or less correctly, in

* Julienne.

Jmoudic, one of Miçkiewicz's dainty ballads, which you have not read because it is no older than I am. If you wish it I will show it to you in Polish, or, if you prefer, in an excellent Russian translation by Pushkin."

I confess I was quite dumfounded. How the Dorpat professor would have chuckled if I had published as original the *daïna* of the " Sons of Boudrys "!

Instead of being amused at my confusion, the Count, with exquisite politeness, hastened to turn the conversation.

" So you have met Mlle. Ioulka? " said he.

" I have had the honour of being presented to her."

" What do you think of her? Speak quite frankly."

" She is a most agreeable young lady."

" So you are pleased to say."

" She is exceedingly pretty."

" Oh! "

" Do you not think she has the loveliest eyes in the world? "

" Yes."

" A complexion of the most dazzling whiteness? . . . I was reminded of a Persian *ghazel,* wherein a lover extols the fineness of his mistress's skin. ' When she drinks red wine,' he

said,' you see it pass down her throat.' The *panna* Iwinska made me think of those Persian lines."

"Mlle. Ioulka may possibly embody that phenomenon; but I do not know if she has any blood in her veins. . . . She has no heart. . . . She is as white and as cold as snow!"

He rose and walked round the room some time without speaking, as though to hide his emotion; then, stopping suddenly—

"Pardon me, he said, "we were talking, I believe, of folk-poetry. . . ."

"We were, Your Excellency."

"After all it must be admitted that she translated Miçkiewicz very prettily. . . . 'Frolicsome as a kitten, . . . white as cream, . . . eyes like stars,' . . . that is her own portrait, do you not agree?"

"Absolutely, Your Excellency."

"With reference to this roguish trick . . . a very ill-judged one, to be sure, . . . the poor child is bored to death by an old aunt. She leads the life of a nun."

"At Wilno she went into society. I saw her at the ball given by the officers of the —— regiment."

"Ah, yes! the society of young officers suits her exactly. To laugh with one, to backbite with another, and to flirt with all of them. . . .

Will you come and see my father's library, Professor?"

I followed him to a long gallery, lined with many handsomely bound books, which, to judge from the dust which covered their edges, were rarely opened. What was my delight to find that one of the first volumes I pulled out of a glass case was the *Catechismus Samogiticus!* I could not help uttering a cry of pleasure. It seemed as though some mysterious power were exerting its influence unknown to us.

The Count took the book, and, after he had turned over the leaves carelessly, wrote on the fly-leaf: "*To Professor Wittembach, from Michael Szémioth.*" I did not know how to express my great gratitude, and I made a mental resolution that after my death this precious book should be the ornament of my own University library.

"If you like to consider this library your workroom," said the Count, "you shall never be disturbed here."

## III

After breakfast the following day the Count proposed that I should take a walk with him. The object in view was to visit a *kapas* (the name given by the Lithuanians to tumuli, called

by the Russians *kourgâne*), a very noted one in that country, because formerly poets and magicians (they are one and the same thing) gathered there on certain special occasions.

"I have a very quiet horse to offer you," he said. "I regret that I can not take you by carriage, but, upon my word, the road we go by is not fit for carriages."

I would rather have stopped in the library taking my notes, but I could not express any wish contrary to that of my generous host, and I accepted. The horses were waiting for us at the foot of the steps in the courtyard, where a groom held a dog in leash.

"Do you know much about dogs, Professor?" said the Count, stopping for a minute and turning to me.

"Hardly anything, Your Excellency."

"The Staroste of Zorany, where I have property, sent me this spaniel, of which he thinks highly. Allow me to show him to you." He called to the groom, who came up with the dog. He was indeed a beautiful creature. The dog was quite used to the man, and leapt joyfully and seemed full of life; but when within a few yards of the Count he put his tail between his legs and hung back terrified. The Count patted him, and at this the dog set up a dismal howl.

"I think he will turn out a good dog with careful training," he said, after having examined him for some time with the eye of a connoisseur. Then he mounted his horse.

"Professor," he said, "when we were in the avenue leading from the château you saw that dog's fear. Please give me your honest opinion. In your capacity of savant you must learn to solve enigmas. . . . Why should animals be afraid of me?"

"Really, Your Excellency does me the honour of taking me for an Œdipus, whilst I am only a simple professor of comparative philology. There might——"

"Observe," he interrupted me, "that I never beat either horses or dogs. I have a scruple against whipping a poor beast who commits a mistake through ignorance. But, nevertheless, you can hardly conceive the aversion that I inspire in dogs and horses. It takes me double the time and trouble to accustom them to me that it would other people. It took me a long time before I could subdue the horse you are riding, but now he is as quiet as a lamb."

"I believe, Your Excellency, that animals are physiognomists, and detect at once if people whom they see for the first time like them or not. I expect you only like animals for the services

they render you; on the other hand, many people have an instinctive partiality for certain beasts, and they find it out at once. Now I, for instance, have always had an instinctive liking for cats. They very rarely run away from me when I try to stroke them, and I have never been scratched by one."

"That is very likely," said the Count; "I can not say I have a real affection for animals. . . . Human beings are so much more to be preferred. We are now coming into a forest, Professor, where the kingdom of beasts still flourishes—the *matecznik,* the womb, the great nursery of beasts. Yes, according to our national traditions, no one has yet penetrated its depths, no one has been able to reach to the heart of these woods and thickets, unless, always excepted, the poets and magicians have, who go everywhere. Here the beasts all live as in a Republic . . . or under a Constitutional Government, I can not tell which of the two. Lions, bears, elks, the *joubrs,* our wild oxen or aurochs, all live very happily together. The mammoth, which is preserved there, is thought highly of; it is, I believe, the Marshal of the Diet. They have a very strict police force, and if they decide that any beast is vicious they sentence him to banishment. It falls thus out of the fry-

ing-pan into the fire; it is obliged to venture into the region of man, and few escape."*

"A very curious legend," I exclaimed; "but, Your Excellency, you speak of the aurochs, that noble animal which Cæsar has described in his *Commentaries,* and which the Merovingian kings hunted in the forest of Compiègne. I am told they still exist in Lithuania—is that so?"

"Certainly. My father himself killed a *joubr,* having obtained permission from the Government. You can see the head in the large dining-hall. I have never seen one. I believe they are very scarce. To make amends we have wolves and bears here in abundance. To guard against a possible encounter with one of these gentlemen I have brought this instrument" (and he produced a Circassian tchékhole † which he carried in his belt), "and my groom carries in his saddle-box a double-barrelled rifle."

We began to penetrate into the forest. Soon the narrow track that we were following disappeared altogether. Every few moments we were obliged to ride round enormous trees whose low branches barred our passage. Several of these, which were dead of old age and fallen over,

* See *Messire Thaddée*, by Mickiewicz, and *Captive Poland*, by M. Charles Edmond.

† A Circassian gun-case.

looked like bulwarks crowned with a line of *chevaux-de-frise* impossible to scale. Elsewhere we encountered deep pools covered with water lilies and duckweed. Further on we came to a clearing where the grass shone like emeralds; but woe to those who ventured on it, for this rich and deceptive vegetation usually hides abysses of mud in which both horse and rider would disappear for ever. . . . The arduousness of the route had interrupted our conversation. All my attention was taken up in following the Count, and I admired the imperturbable sagacity with which he guided his way without compass, and always regained the right direction which had to be followed to reach the kapas. It was evident that he had frequently hunted in these wild forests.

At last we perceived the tumulus in the centre of a large clearing. It was very high and surrounded by a fosse still clearly recognisable in spite of the landslips. It looked as though it had recently been excavated. At the summit I noticed the remains of an erection built of stones, some of which bore traces of fire. A considerable quantity of ashes, mixed with pieces of charcoal, with here and there fragments of coarse crockery, attested that there had been a fire on the top of the tumulus for a considerable time.

If one can put faith in popular tradition, human sacrifices had been offered several times in the kapas; but there is hardly any extinct religion to which these abominable rites have not been attributed, and I imagine one could justify a similar theory with regard to the ancient Lithuanians from historic evidence.

We came down from the tumulus to rejoin our horses, which we had left on the far side of the fosse, when we saw an old woman approaching us, leaning on a stick and holding a basket in her hand.

"Good day, gentlemen," she said to us as she came up, "I ask an alms for the love of God. Give me something for a glass of brandy to warm my poor body."

The Count threw her a coin, and asked what she was doing in the wood, so far from habitation. For sole answer she showed him her basket filled with mushrooms. Although my knowledge of botany was but limited, I thought several of the mushrooms looked like poisonous ones.

"My good woman," I said, "you are not going to eat those, I hope."

"Sir," the old woman replied, with a sad smile, "poor folk eat all the good God gives them."

"You are not acquainted with Lithuanian

stomachs," the Count put in; "they are lined with sheet iron. Our peasants eat every kind of fungus they find, and are none the worse for them."

"At least prevent her from tasting the *agaricus necator* she has in her basket," I cried, and I stretched out my hand to take one of the most poisonous of the mushrooms, but the old woman quickly withdrew the basket.

"Take care," she said in a frightened tone; "they are protected . . . *Pirkuns! Pirkuns!*"

"*Pirkuns,*" I may explain in passing, is the Samogitian name for the divinity called by the Russians *Péroune;* it is the Jupiter *tonans* of the Slavs. If I was surprised when I heard the old woman invoke a pagan god, I was much more astonished to see the mushrooms heave up. The black head of a snake raised itself at least a foot out of the basket. I jumped back, and the Count spat over his shoulder after the superstitious custom of the Slavs, who believe that in this way they turn away misfortune, as did the ancient Romans. The old woman put the basket on the ground, and crouched by its side; then she held out her hand towards the snake, pronouncing some unintelligible words like an incantation. The snake remained quiet a moment,

then it curled itself round the shrivelled arm of the old woman and disappeared in the sleeve of her sheepskin cloak, which, with a dirty chemise, comprised, I believe, all the dress of this Lithuanian Circe. The old woman looked at us with a little laugh of triumph, like a conjurer who has just executed a difficult trick. Her face wore that mixture of cunning and stupidity which is often noticeable in would-be witches, who are mostly scoundrels and dupes.

"Here you have," said the Count in German, "a specimen of local colour; a witch who tames snakes, at the foot of a kapas, in the presence of a learned professor and of an ignorant Lithuanian gentleman. It would make a capital subject for a picture of natural life by your countryman Knauss. . . . If you wish to have your fortune told, this is a good opportunity."

I replied that I did not encourage such practices.

"I would much rather," I added, "ask her if she knows anything about that curious superstition of which you spoke. Good woman," I said to her, "have you heard tell of a part of this forest where the beasts live in a community, independent of man's rule?"

The witch nodded her head in the affirmative,

and she gave a low laugh, half silly, half malicious.

"I come from it," she said. "The beasts have lost their king. Noble, the lion, is dead; the animals are about to elect another king. If you go there perhaps they will make you king."

"What are you saying, mother?" and the Count burst into shouts of laughter. "Do you know to whom you are talking? Do you not know that this gentleman is . . . (what the deuce do they call a professor in Jmoudic?) a great savant, a sage, a *waïdelote?*" *

The witch stared at him fixedly.

"I was mistaken," she said. "It is thou who ought to go there. Thou wilt be their king, not he; thou art tall, and strong, and hast claws and teeth."

"What do you think of the epigrams she levels at us?" said the Count. "Can you show us the way, mother?" he asked.

She pointed with her hand to a part of the forest.

"Indeed?" said the Count. "And how can you get across the marsh? You must know, Professor, that she pointed to an impassable swamp, a lake of liquid mud covered over with green

* A bad translation of the word "professor." The *waïdelotes* were the Lithuanian bards.

grass. Last year a stag that I wounded plunged into this infernal marsh, and I watched him sink slowly, slowly. . . . In five minutes I saw only his horns, and soon he disappeared completely, two of my dogs with him."

"But I am not heavy," said the old woman, chuckling.

"I think you could cross the marsh easily on a broomstick."

A flash of anger shone in the old woman's eyes.

"Sir," she said, returning to the drawling and nasal twang of the beggar, "haven't you a pipe of tobacco to give a poor woman? Thou hadst better search for a passage through the swamp than go to Dowghielly," she added in a lower tone.

"Dowghielly!" said the Count, reddening, "what do you mean?"

I could not help noticing that this word produced a singular effect upon him. He was visibly embarrassed; he lowered his head in order to hide his confusion, and busied himself over opening the tobacco pouch which hung at the hilt of his hunting knife.

"No, do not go to Dowghielly," repeated the old woman. "The little white dove is not for thee, is she, *Pirkuns?*"

At that moment the snake's head appeared out of the collar of the old woman's cloak and stretched up to its mistress's ear. The reptile, trained doubtless to the trick, moved its jaws as though it spoke.

"He says I am right?" said the old woman.

The Count gave her a handful of tobacco.

"Do you know me?" he asked.

"No, sir."

"I am the master of Médintiltas. Come and see me one of these days; I will give you tobacco and brandy."

The old woman kissed his hand and moved away with rapid strides. We soon lost sight of her. The Count remained thoughtful, tying and untying the fastenings of his bag, hardly conscious of what he was doing.

"Professor," he said to me after a somewhat long silence, "you will laugh at me. That old crone knew both me and the road which she showed me better than she pretended. . . . After all, there is nothing so very surprising in that. I am as well known in this countryside as the white wolf. The jade has seen me several times on the road to Dowghielly Castle. . . . A marriageable young lady lives there, so she concluded that I was in love. . . . Then some handsome boy has bribed her to tell me

bad luck. . . . It is obvious enough. Nevertheless, . . . in spite of myself, her words have affected me. I am almost frightened by them. . . . You have cause to laugh. . . . The truth is that I intended to go and ask for dinner at the Castle of Dowghielly, and now I hesitate. . . . I am a great fool. Come, Professor, you decide it. Shall we go?"

"In questions of marriage I never give advice," I said laughingly. "I take good care not to have an opinion.

We had come back to our horses.

"The horse shall choose for me," cried the Count, as he vaulted into the saddle and let the bridle lie slack.

The horse did not hesitate; he immediately entered a little footpath, which, after several turnings, descended into a metalled road which led to Dowghielly. Half an hour after we reached the Castle steps.

At the sound of our horses a pretty, fair head appeared at a window, framed between two curtains. I recognised the translator of Miçkiewicz, who had taken me in.

"You are welcome," she said. "You could not have come more apropos, Count Szémioth. A dress from Paris has just arrived for me. I shall be lovely past recognition."

The curtains closed again.

" It is certainly not for me that she is putting on this dress for the first time," muttered the Count between his teeth whilst mounting the steps.

He introduced me to Madam Dowghiello, the aunt of the *panna* Iwinska, who received me courteously and spoke to me of my last articles in the Koenigsberg *Scientific and Literary Gazette.*

" The Professor has come to complain to you," said the Count, " of the malicious trick which Mademoiselle Ioulka played on him.

" She is a child, Professor; you must forgive her. She often drives me to distraction with her follies. I had more sense at sixteen than she has at twenty, but she is a good girl at heart, and she has many good qualities. She is an admirable musician, she paints flowers exquisitely, and she speaks French, German and Italian equally well. . . . She embroiders."

" And she composes Jmoudic verses," added the Count, laughing.

" She is incapable of it," exclaimed Madam Dowghiello; and they had to explain her niece's mischievousness.

Madam Dowghiello was well educated, and

knew the antiquities of her country. Her conversation was particularly agreeable to me. She read many of our German reviews, and held very sane views upon philology. I admit that I did not notice the time that Mademoiselle Iwinska took to dress, but it seemed long to Count Szémioth, who got up and sat down again, looked out of the window, and drummed on the pane with his fingers as a man who has lost patience.

At length, at the end of three-quarters of an hour, Mademoiselle Julienne appeared, wearing with exquisite grace a dress which would require more critical knowledge than mine to describe. She was followed by her French governess.

"Do I not look pretty?" she said to the Count, turning round slowly so that he could see her from all sides.

She did not look either at the Count or at me, but at her new dress.

"How is it, Ioulka," said Madam Dowghiello, "that you do not say good day to the Professor? He complains of you."

"Ah, Professor!" she cried, with a charming little pout. "What have I done? Have you come to make me do penance?"

"We shall punish ourselves, Mademoiselle,

if we deprive ourselves of your presence," I answered. "I am far from complaining; on the contrary, I congratulate myself on having learnt, thanks to you, that the Lithuanian Muse has reappeared more brightly than ever."

She lowered her head, and, putting her hands before her face, taking care not to disarrange her hair, she said, in the tones of a child who has just stolen some sweetmeats—

"Forgive me; I will not do it again."

"I will only pardon you, my dear Pani," I said to her, "if you will fulfil a certain promise which you were good enough to make to me at Wilno, at the house of the Princess Katazyna Paç."

"What promise?" she asked, raising her head and laughing.

"Have you forgotten so soon? You promised me that if we met in Samogitia you would let me see a certain country dance which you said was enchanting."

"Oh, the roussalka! I shall be charmed; and the very man I need is here."

She ran to a table loaded with music-books, and, turning over one hastily, put it on the piano stand.

"Mind, my dear, *allegro presto,*" she said, addressing her governess. And she played the

prelude herself, without sitting down, to show the time.

"Come here, Count Michel! you are too much of a Lithuanian not to be able to dance the roussalka; . . . but dance like a peasant, you understand."

Madam Dowghiello in vain tried to object. The Count and I insisted. He had his motives, for his part in the dance was extremely agreeable, as we soon saw. The governess, after several attempts, said she thought she could play that kind of waltz, strange though it was; so Mademoiselle Ioulka, after moving some chairs and a table that were in the way, took hold of her partner by the collar of his coat and led him into the centre of the room.

"You must know, Professor, that I am a roussalka, at your service."

She made a low bow.

"A roussalka is a water nymph. There is one in each of the big pools of black water which adorn our forests. Do not go near! The roussalka comes out, lovelier even than I, if that be possible; she carries you to the bottom, where, very likely, she gobbles you up. . . . "

"A real siren," I cried.

"He," continued Mademoiselle Ioulka, pointing to Count Szémioth, "is a very foolish

young fisherman who exposes himself to my clutches, and, to make the pleasure last longer, I fascinate him by dancing round him for a time. . . . But, alas! to do it properly I want a sarafane.* What a pity! You must please excuse this dress, which has neither character nor local colour. . . . Oh! and I have slippers on. It is quite impossible to dance the roussalka with slippers on . . . . and heels on them too."

She picked up her dress, and, daintily shaking a pretty little foot at the risk of showing her leg, she sent the slipper flying to the end of the drawing-room. The other followed the first, and she stood upon the parquetry floor in her silken stockings.

"We are quite ready," she said to the governess. And the dance began.

The roussalka revolves and revolves round her partner; he stretches out his arms to seize her, but she slips underneath them and escapes. It is very graceful, and the music has movement and originality. The figure ends when the partner, believing that he has seized the roussalka, tries to give her a kiss, and she makes a bound, strikes him on the shoulder, and he falls dead at her feet. . . . But the Count improvised

* A peasant's skirt, without a bodice.

a variation, strained the winsome creature in his arms, and kissed her again and again. Mademoiselle Ioulka uttered a little cry, blushed deeply, and threw herself, pouting, onto a couch, complaining that he had hugged her like the bear that he was. I saw that the comparison did not please the Count, for it brought to his mind the family misfortune, and his brow darkened. I thanked Mademoiselle Ioulka most warmly, and praised her dance, which seemed to me to have an antique flavour and recalled the sacred dances of the Greeks. I was interrupted by a servant announcing General and Princess Véliaminof. Mademoiselle Ioulka leaped to the sofa for her shoes, hastily thrust in her little feet, and ran to meet the Princess, making successively two profound bows. I noticed that at each bow she adroitly drew on part of her slipper. The General brought with him two aides-de-camp, and, like us, had come to ask for hospitality. In any other country I imagine the mistress of the house would have been a little embarrassed to receive all at once six hungry and unexpected guests; but Lithuanian hospitality is so lavish that the dinner was not more than half an hour late, I think; there were too many pies, however, both hot and cold.

## IV

The dinner was very lively. The General gave us a most interesting account of the dialects spoken in the Caucasus, some of which are Aryan, and others Turanian, although between the different peoples there is a remarkable uniformity in manners and customs. I had to talk of my travels because Count Szémioth congratulated me on the way I sat a horse, and said he had never met a minister or a professor who could have managed so easily such a journey as the one we had taken. I explained to him that, commissioned by the Bible Society to write a work on the language of the *Charruas,* I had spent three and a half years in the Republic of Uruguay, nearly always on horseback, and living in the pampas among the Indians. This led me to relate how, when lost for three days in those boundless plains, without food or water, I had been reduced, like the *gauchos* who accompanied me, to bleed my horse and drink his blood.

All the ladies uttered a cry of horror. The General observed that the Kalmouks did the same in similar extremities. The Count asked me what the drink tasted like.

" Morally, it was most repugnant," I replied,

"but, physically, I found it rather good, and it is owing to it that I have the honour of dining here to-day. Many Europeans, I mean white men, who have lived for a long time with the Indians, accustom themselves to it, and even get to like the taste. My good friend Don Fructuoso Rivero, President of the Republic, hardly ever missed a chance of gratifying it. I recollect one day, when he was going to Congress in full uniform, he passed a *rancho* where a young foal was being bled. He got off his horse to ask for a *chupon,* a suck; after which he delivered one of his most eloquent speeches."

"Your President is a hideous monster," cried Mademoiselle Ioulka.

"Pardon me, my dear Pani," I said to her, "he is a very distinguished person, with a most enlightened mind. He speaks several very difficult Indian dialects to perfection, specially the *Charrua,* the verbs of which take innumerable forms, according to whether its objective is direct or indirect, and even according to the social relations of the persons who speak."

I was about to give some very curious instances of the construction of the *Charrua* verb, but the Count interrupted me to ask what part of the horse they bled when they wanted to drink its blood.

"For goodness' sake, my dear Professor," cried Mademoiselle Ioulka, with a comic expression of terror, "do not tell him. He is just the man to slay his whole stable, and to eat us up ourselves when he has no more horses left!"

Upon this sally the ladies laughingly left the table to prepare tea and coffee whilst we smoked. In a quarter of an hour they sent from the drawing-room for the General. We all prepared to go with him; but we were told that the ladies only wished one man at a time. Very soon we heard from the drawing-room loud bursts of laughter and clapping of hands.

"Mademoiselle Ioulka is up to her pranks," said the Count.

He was sent for next; and again there followed laughter and applause. It was my turn after his. By the time I had reached the room every face had taken on a pretended gravity which did not bode well. I expected some trick.

"Professor," said the General to me in his most official manner, "these ladies maintain that we have given too kind a reception to their champagne, and they will not admit us among them until after a test. You must walk from the middle of the room to that wall with your eyes bandaged, and touch it with your finger. You

see how easy it is; you have only to walk straight. Are you able to keep a straight line? "

"I think so, General."

Mademoiselle Ioulka then threw a handkerchief over my eyes and tied it tightly behind.

"You are in the middle of the room," she said; "stretch out your hand. . . . That is right! I wager that you will not touch the wall."

"Forward, march!" called out the General.

There were only five or six steps to take. I advanced very cautiously, sure that I should encounter some cord or footstool treacherously placed in my path to trip me up, and I could hear stifled laughter, which increased my confusion. At length I believed I was quite close to the wall, when my outstretched finger suddenly went into something cold and sticky. I made a grimace and started back, which set all the onlookers laughing. I tore off my bandage, and saw Mademoiselle Ioulka standing near me holding a pot of honey, into which I had thrust my finger, thinking that I touched the wall. My only consolation was to watch the two aides-de-camp pass through the same ordeal, with no better result than I.

Throughout the evening Mademoiselle Ioulka never ceased to give vent to her frolicsome humour. Ever teasing, ever mischievous, she

made first one, then another, the butt of her fun. I observed, however, that she more frequently addressed herself to the Count, who, I must say, never took offence, and even seemed to enjoy her allurements. But when, on the other hand, she began an attack upon one of the aides-de-camp, he frowned, and I saw his eyes kindle with that dull fire which was almost terrifying. "Frolicsome as a kitten and as white as cream." I thought in writing that verse Miçkiewicz must surely have wished to draw the portrait of the *panna* Ioulka.

## V

It was very late before we retired to bed. In many of the great houses in Lithuania there is plenty of splendid silver plate, fine furniture, and valuable Persian carpets; but they have not, as in our dear Germany, comfortable feather beds to offer the tired guest. Rich or poor, nobleman or peasant, a Slav can sleep quite soundly on a board. The Castle of Dowghielly was no exception to this general rule. In the room to which the Count and I were conducted there were but two couches newly covered with morocco leather. This did not distress me much, as I had often slept on the bare earth in my

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travels, and I laughed a little at the Count's exclamations upon the barbarous customs of his compatriots. A servant came to take off our boots and to bring us dressing-gowns and slippers. When the Count had taken off his coat, he walked up and down awhile in silence, then he stopped in front of the couch, upon which I had already stretched myself.

"What do you think of Ioulka?" he said.

"I think she is bewitching."

"Yes, but such a flirt! . . . Do you believe she has any liking for that fair-haired little captain?"

"The aide-de-camp? . . . How should I tell?"

"He is a fop! . . . So he ought to please women."

"I deny your conclusion, Count. Do you wish me to tell you the truth? Mademoiselle Ioulka thinks far more how to please Count Szémioth than to please all the aides-de-camp in the army."

He blushed without replying; but I saw that my words had given him great pleasure. He walked about again for some time without speaking; then, after looking at his watch, he said—

"Good gracious! we must really go to sleep; it is very late."

He took his rifle and his hunting knife, which had been placed in our room, put them in a cupboard, and took out the key.

"Will you keep it?" he said; and to my great surprise he gave it to me. "I might forget it. You certainly have a better memory than I have."

"The best way not to forget your weapons would be to place them on that table near your sofa," I said.

"No. . . . Look here, to tell you the truth, I do not like to have arms by me when I am asleep. . . . This is the reason. When I was in the Grodno Hussars, I slept one night in a room with a companion, and my pistols were on the chair near me. In the night I was awakened by a report. I had a pistol in my hand; I had fired, and the bullet had passed within two inches of my comrade's head. . . . I have never been able to remember the dream I had."

I was a little disturbed by his anecdote. I was guarded against having a bullet through my head; but, when I looked at the tall figure of my companion, with his herculean shoulders and his muscular arms covered with black down, I could not help recognising that he was perfectly able to strangle me with his hands if he had

a bad dream. I took care, however, not to let him see that I felt the slightest uneasiness. I merely put a light on a chair close to my couch, and began to read the *Catechism* of Lawiçki, which I had brought with me. The Count wished me good night, and lay down on his sofa, upon which he turned over five or six times; at last he seemed asleep, although he was doubled up like Horace's lover, who, shut up in a chest, touched his head with his bent knees.

". . . Turpi clausus in arca,
Contractum genibus tangas caput. . . ."

From time to time he sighed heavily, or made a kind of nervous rattle, which I attributed to the peculiar position in which he had chosen to sleep. An hour perhaps passed in this way, and I myself became drowsy. I shut my book, and settled myself as comfortably as was possible on my bed, when an odd giggling sound from my neighbour set me trembling. I looked at the Count. His eyes were shut; his whole body shuddered; from his half-opened lips escaped some hardly articulate words.

" So fresh! . . . so white! . . . The Professor did not know what he said. . . . Horse is not worth a straw. . . . What a delicious morsel! "

The snake remained quiet a moment, then it curled itself round the shrivelled arm of the old woman and disappeared in the sleeve of her sheep-skin cloak.

*An etching from a drawing by A. Robaudi.*

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The Professor did not know what he said. His Horse is not worth a straw. . . . a delicious morsel!

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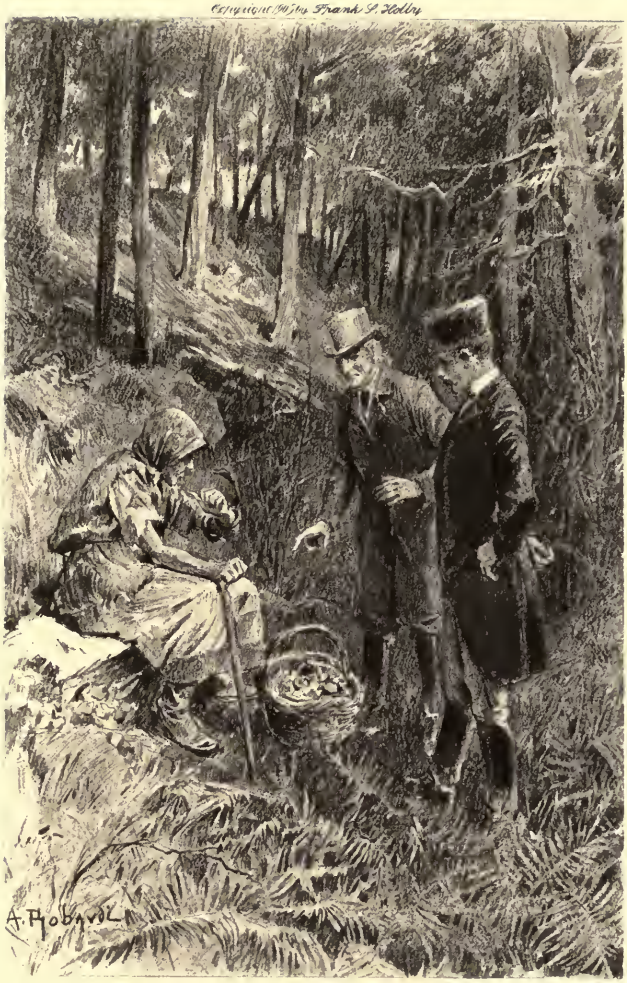

Then he began to bite the cushion, on which his head rested, with all his might, growling at the same time so loudly that he woke himself.

I remained quite still on my couch, and pretended to be asleep. Nevertheless, I watched him. He sat up, rubbed his eyes, sighed sadly, and remained for nearly an hour without changing his position, absorbed apparently in his reflections. I was, however, very ill at ease, and I inwardly vowed never again to sleep by the side of the Count. But in the long run weariness overcame disquiet, and when the servant came to our room in the morning, we were both in a profound sleep.

## VI

We returned to Médintiltas after breakfast. When I found Dr. Froeber alone, I told him that I believed the Count was unwell, that he had had frightful dreams, was possibly a somnambulist and would be dangerous in that condition.

"I am aware of all that," said the doctor. "With an athletic organisation he is at the same time as nervous as a highly strung woman. Perhaps he gets it from his mother. . . . She has been devilishly bad to-day. . . . I do not believe much in stories of fright and longings

of pregnant women; but one thing is certain, the Countess is mad, and madness can be inherited. . . ."

"But the Count," I returned, "is perfectly sane: his mind is sound, he has much higher intelligence than, I admit, I should have expected; he loves reading. . . ."

"I grant it, my dear sir, I grant it; but he is often eccentric. Sometimes he shuts himself up for several days; often he roams about at night. He reads unheard-of books. . . . German metaphysics . . . physiology, and I know not what! Even yesterday a package of them came from Leipzig. Must I speak plainly? A Hercules needs a Hebe. There are some very pretty peasant girls here. . . . On Saturday evenings, when they have washed, you might mistake them for princesses. . . . There is not one of them but would be only too proud to distract my lord. I, at his age, devil take me! . . . No, he has no mistress; he will not marry; it is wrong. He ought to have something to occupy his mind."

The doctor's coarse materialism shocked me extremely, and I abruptly terminated the conversation by saying that I sincerely wished that Count Szémioth should find a wife worthy of him. I was surprised, I must admit, when I

learnt from the doctor of the Count's taste for philosophical studies. It went against all my preconceived ideas that this officer of the Hussars, this ardent sportsman, should read German metaphysics and engage himself in physiology. The doctor spoke the truth, however, as I had proof thereof even that very day.

"How do you explain, Professor," he said to me suddenly towards the close of dinner—"how do you explain the *duality* or the *twofold nature* of our being?"

And when he observed that I did not quite follow him, he went on—

"Have you never found yourself at the top of a tower, or even at the edge of a precipice, having at the same time a desire to throw yourself down into space, and a feeling of terror absolutely the reverse? . . ."

"That can be explained on purely physical grounds," said the doctor; "first, the fatigue of walking up hill sends a rush of blood to the brain, which——"

"Let us leave aside the question of the blood, doctor," broke in the Count impatiently, "and take another instance. You hold a loaded firearm. Your best friend stands by. The idea occurs to you to put a ball through his head. You hold assassination in the greatest horror,

but all the same, you have thought of it. I believe, gentlemen, that if all the thoughts which come into our heads in the course of an hour . . . I believe that if all *your* thoughts, Professor, whom I hold to be so wise, were written down, they would form a folio volume probably, after the perusal of which there would not be a single lawyer who could successfully defend you, nor a judge who would not either put you in prison or even in a lunatic asylum."

"That judge, Count, would certainly not condemn me for having hunted, for more than an hour this morning, for the mysterious law that decides which Slavonic verbs take a future tense when joined to a preposition; but if by chance I had some other thought, what proof of it could you bring against me? I am no more master of my thoughts than of the external accidents which suggest them to me. Because a thought springs up in my mind, it can not be implied that I have put it into execution, or even resolved to do so. I have never thought of killing anybody; but, if the thought of a murder comes into my mind, is not my reason there to drive it away?"

"You talk with great certainty of your reason; but is it always with us, as you say, to guide us? Reflection, that is to say, time and coolness

are necessary to make the reason speak and be obeyed. Has one always both of these? In battle I see a bullet coming towards me; it rebounds, and I get out of the way; by so doing I expose my friend, for whose life I would have given my own if I had had time for reflection. . . ."

I tried to point out to him our duty as men and Christians, the obligation we are under to imitate the warrior of the Scriptures, always ready for battle; at length I made him see that in constantly struggling against our passions we gain fresh strength to weaken and to overcome them. I only succeeded, I fear, in reducing him to silence, and he did not seem convinced.

I stayed but ten days longer at the Castle. I paid one more visit to Dowghielly, but we did not sleep there. As on the first occasion, Mlle. Ioulka acted like a frolicsome and spoilt child. She exercised a kind of fascination over the Count, and I did not doubt that he was very much in love with her. At the same time he knew her faults thoroughly, and was under no illusions. He knew she was a frivolous coquette, and indifferent to all that did not afford her amusement. I could see that he often suffered internally at seeing her so unreasonable; but as soon as she paid him some little attention his

face shone, and he beamed with joy, forgetful of all else. He wished to take me to Dowghielly for the last time the day before my departure, possibly because whilst I could stay talking with the aunt, he could walk in the garden with the niece; but I had so much work to do I was obliged to excuse myself, however much he urged. He returned to dinner, although he had told us not to wait. He came to table, but could not eat. He was gloomy and ill-tempered all through the meal. From time to time his eyebrows contracted and his eyes assumed a sinister expression. When the doctor returned to the Countess, the Count followed me to my room, and told me all that was on his mind.

"I heartily repent," he exclaimed, "having left you to go and see that little fool who makes game of me, and only cares for fresh faces; but, fortunately, all is over between us; I am utterly disgusted, and I will never see her again. . . ."

For some time he paced up and down according to his usual habit.

"You thought, perhaps, I was in love with her?" he went on. "That is what the silly doctor thinks. No, I have never loved her. Her merry look amused me. Her white skin gave me pleasure to look at. . . . That is all there

is pleasing about her, . . . her complexion especially. She has no brains. I have never seen anything in her but just a pretty doll, agreeable to look at when one is tired and lacks a new book. . . . There is no doubt she is beautiful. . . . Her skin is marvellous! . . . The blood under that skin ought to be better than a horse's. . . . Do you not think so, Professor?"

And he laughed aloud, but his laugh was not pleasant to hear.

I said good-bye to him the next day, to continue my explorations in the north of the Palatinate.

## VII

They lasted nearly two months, and I can say that there is hardly a village in Samogitia where I did not stop and where I did not collect some documents. I may here be allowed, perhaps, to take this opportunity of thanking the inhabitants of that province, and especially the Church dignitaries, for the truly warm co-operation they accorded me in my researches, and the excellent contributions with which they have enriched my dictionary.

After staying a week at Szawlé, I intended to embark at Klaypeda (the seaport which we call Memel) to return to my home, when I received the following letter from Count Szémioth, which was brought by one of his huntsmen:—

"My dear Professor,—Allow me to write to you in German, for I should commit too many errors in grammar if I wrote in Jmoudic, and you would lose all respect for me. I am not sure you have much of that as it is, and the news that I am about to communicate to you will probably not increase it. Without more ado, I am going to be married, and you will guess to whom. *Jove laughs at lovers' vows.* So said Pirkuns, our Samogitian Jupiter. It is, then, Mlle. Julienne Ioulka that I am to marry on the 8th of next month. You will be the kindest of men if you will come and assist at the ceremony. All the peasantry of Médintiltas and the neighbouring districts will come to devour several oxen and countless swine, and, when they are drunk, they will dance in the meadow, which, you will remember, lies on the right of the avenue. You will see costumes and customs worthy of your consideration. It will give me and also Julienne the greatest pleasure if you come, and I must add that your refusal would place us in a most awkward situation. You know that I belong to the Evangelical Communion, as does my betrothed; now, our minister, who lives about thirty leagues away, is

crippled with gout, and I ventured to hope you would be so good as to act in his stead.

"Believe me, my dear Professor,

"Yours very devotedly,

"MICHEL SZÉMIOTH."

At the end of the letter, in the form of a postscript, had been added in Jmoudic, in a pretty feminine handwriting:

"I, the muse of Lithuania, write in Jmoudic. Michel is very impertinent to question your approval. There is no one but I, indeed, who would be so silly as to marry such a fellow as he. You will see, Professor, on the 8th of next month, a bride who may be called *chic*. That is not a Jmoudic word; it is French. But please do not be distracted during the ceremony."

Neither the letter nor the postscript pleased me. I thought the engaged couple showed an inexcusable levity concerning such a solemn occasion. However, how was I to decline? And yet I will admit that the promised pageant had its attractions for me. According to all appearance, I should not fail to find among the great number of gentlefolk, who would be gathered together at the Castle of Médintiltas, some learned people who would furnish me with useful information. My Jmoudic glossary was very good; but the sense of a certain number of words which I had

learnt from the lips of the lowest of the peasants was still, relatively speaking, somewhat obscure to me. All these considerations combined were sufficiently strong to make me consent to the Count's request, and I replied that I would be at Médintiltas by the morning of the 8th.

How greatly had I occasion to repent of my decision!

## VIII

On entering the avenue which led to the Castle I saw a great number of ladies and gentlemen in morning dress standing in groups on the steps of the entrance or walking about the paths of the park. The court was filled with peasants in their Sunday attire. The Castle bore a festive air; everywhere were flowers and wreaths, flags and festoons. The head servant led me to the room on the ground floor which had been assigned to me, apologising for not being able to offer me a better one; but there were so many visitors in the Castle that it had been impossible to reserve me the room I had occupied during my first visit, which had been given to the wife of the premier Marshal. My new chamber was, however, very comfortable; it looked on the park, and was below the Count's

apartment. I dressed myself hastily for the ceremony, and put on my surplice, but neither the Count nor his betrothed made their appearance. The Count had gone to fetch her from Dowghielly. They should have come back a long time before this; but a bride's toilet is not a light business, and the doctor had warned the guests that as the breakfast would not take place till after the religious ceremony, those whose appetites were impatient would do well to fortify themselves at a sideboard, which was spread with cakes and all kinds of drinks. I remarked at the time that the delay excited ill-natured remarks; two mothers of pretty girls invited to the fête did not refrain from epigrams launched at the bride.

It was past noon when a salvo of cannon and muskets heralded her arrival, and soon after a state carriage entered the avenue drawn by four magnificent horses. It was easily seen by the foam which covered their chests that the delay had not been on their part. There was no one in the carriage besides the bride, Madam Dowghiello and the Count. He got out and gave his hand to Madam Dowghiello. Mademoiselle Ioulka, with a gracefully coquettish gesture, pretended to hide under a shawl to avoid the curious looks which surrounded her on all sides.

But she stood up in the carriage, and was just about to take the Count's hand when the wheelers, terrified maybe by the showers of flowers that the peasants threw at the bride, perhaps also seized with that strange terror which animals seemed to experience at the sight of Count Szémioth, pranced and snorted; a wheel struck the column at the foot of the flight of steps, and for a moment an accident was feared. Mademoiselle Ioulka uttered a little cry, . . . but all minds were soon relieved, for the Count snatched her in his arms and carried her to the top of the steps as easily as though she had been a dove. We all applauded his presence of mind and his chivalrously gallant conduct. The peasants yelled terrific hurrahs, and the blushing bride laughed and trembled simultaneously. The Count, who was not at all in a hurry to rid himself of his charming burden, evidently exulted in showing her picture to the surrounding crowd. . . .

Suddenly a tall, pale, thin woman, with disordered dress and dishevelled hair, and every feature in her face drawn with terror, appeared at the top of the flight of stairs before anyone could tell whence she sprang.

"Look at the bear!" she shrieked in a piercing voice, "look at the bear! . . . Get your

guns! . . . He has carried off a woman! Kill him! Fire! fire!"

It was the Countess. The bride's arrival had attracted everybody to the entrance and to the courtyard or to the windows of the Castle. Even the women who kept guard over the poor maniac had forgotten their charge; she had escaped, and, without being observed by anyone, had come upon us all. It was a most painful scene. She had to be removed, in spite of her cries and resistance. Many of the guests knew nothing about the nature of her illness, and matters had to be explained to them. People whispered in a low tone for a long time after. All faces looked shocked. "It is an ill omen," said the superstitious, and their number is great in Lithuania.

However, Mlle. Ioulka begged for five minutes to settle her toilet and put on her bridal veil, an operation which lasted a full hour. It was more than was required to inform the people who did not know of the Countess's illness of the cause and of its details.

At last the bride reappeared, magnificently attired and covered with diamonds. Her aunt introduced her to all the guests, and, when the moment came to go into the chapel, Madam Dowghiello, to my great astonishment, slapped

her niece on the cheek, in the presence of the whole company, hard enough to make those whose attention was not otherwise engaged to turn round. The blow was received with perfect equanimity, and no one seemed surprised; but a man in black wrote something on a paper which he carried, and several of the persons present signed their names with the most nonchalant air. Not until after the ceremony did I find a clue to the riddle. Had I guessed it I should not have failed to oppose the abominable custom with the whole weight of my sacred office as a minister of religion. It was to set up a case for divorce by pretending that the marriage only took place by reason of the physical force exercised against one of the contracting parties.

After the religious service I felt it my duty to address a few words to the young couple, confining myself to putting before them the gravity and sacredness of the bond by which they had just united themselves; and, as I still had Mlle. Ioulka's postscript on my mind, I reminded her that she was now entering a new life, no longer accompanied by childish pleasures and amusements, but filled with serious duties and grave trials. I thought that this portion of my sermon produced much effect upon

the bride, as well as on everyone present who understood German.

Volleys of firing and shouts of joy greeted the procession as it came out of the chapel on its way to the dining-hall. The repast was splendid and the appetites very keen; at first no other sounds were audible but the clatter of knives and forks. Soon, however, warmed by champagne and Hungarian wines, the people began to talk and laugh, and even to shout. The health of the bride was drunk with enthusiastic cheers. They had scarcely resumed their seats when an old *pane* with white moustaches rose up.

" I am grieved to see," he said in a loud voice, " that our ancient customs are disappearing. Our forefathers would never have drunk this toast from glasses of crystal. We drank out of the bride's slipper, and even out of her boot; for in my time ladies wore red morocco boots. Let us show, my friends, that we are still true Lithuanians. And you, Madam, condescend to give me your slipper."

" Come, take it, Monsieur," replied the bride, blushing and stifling a laugh; . . . but I can not satisfy you with a boot."

The *pane* did not wait a second bidding; he threw himself gracefully on his knees, took off

a little white satin slipper with a red heel, filled it with champagne, and drank so quickly and so cleverly that not more than half fell on his clothes. The slipper was passed round, and all the men drank out of it, but not without difficulty. The old gentleman claimed the shoe as a precious relic, and Madam Dowghiello sent for a maid to repair her niece's disordered toilet.

This toast was followed by many others, and soon the guests became so noisy that it did not become me to remain with them longer. I escaped from the table without being noticed and went outside the Castle to get some fresh air, but there, too, I found a none too edifying spectacle. The servants and peasants who had had beer and spirits to their heart's content were nearly all of them already tipsy. There had been quarrelling and some heads broken. Here and there drunken men lay rolling on the grass in a state of stupidity, and the general aspect of the fête looked much like a field of battle. I should have been interested to watch the popular dances quite close, but most of them were led by impudent gipsies, and I did not think it becoming to venture into such a hubbub. I went back, therefore, to my room and read for some time; then I undressed and soon fell asleep.

When I awoke the Castle clock was striking three o'clock. It was a fine night, although the moon was half shrouded by a light mist. I tried to go to sleep again, but I could not manage it. According to my usual habit when I could not sleep I thought to take up a book and read, but I could not find matches within reach. I got up and was going to grope about the room when a dark body of great bulk passed before my window and fell with a dull thud into the garden. My first impression was that it was a man, and I thought possibly it was one of the drunken men, who had fallen out of the window. I opened mine and looked out, but I could not see anything. I lighted a candle at last, and, getting back into bed, I had gone through my glossary again just as they brought me a cup of tea. Towards eleven o'clock I went to the salon, where I found many scowling eyes and disconcerted looks. I learnt, in short, that the table had not been left until a very late hour. Neither the Count nor the young Countess had yet appeared. At half-past eleven, after many ill-timed jokes, people began to grumble—at first below their breath, but soon aloud. Dr. Froeber took upon himself to send the Count's valet to knock at his master's door. In a quarter of an hour the man came back looking

anxious, and reported to Dr. Froeber that he had knocked more than a dozen times without getting any answer. Madam Dowghiello, the doctor and I consulted together. The valet's uneasiness influenced me. We all three went upstairs with him and found the young Countess's maid outside the door very scared, declaring that something dreadful had happened, for Madam's window was wide open. I recollected with horror that heavy body falling past my window. We knocked loudly; still no answer. At length the valet brought an iron bar, and we forced the door. . . . No! courage fails me to describe the scene which presented itself to our eyes. The young Countess was stretched dead on her bed, her face horribly torn, her throat cut open and covered with blood. The Count had disappeared, and no one has ever heard news of him since.

The doctor examined the young girl's ghastly wound.

"It was not a steel blade," he exclaimed, "which did this wound. . . . It was a bite. . . ."

* * * * *

The doctor closed his book, and looked thoughtfully into the fire.

"And is that the end of the story?" asked Adelaide.

"The end," replied the Professor in a melancholy voice.

"But," she continued, "why have you called it '*Lokis*'? Not a single person in it is so called."

"It is not the name of a man," said the Professor. 'Come, Théodore, do you understand what '*Lokis*' means?"

"Not in the very least."

"If you were thoroughly steeped in the law of transformation from the Sanskrit into Lithuanian, you would have recognised in *lokis* the Sanskrit *arkcha,* or *rikscha.* The Lithuanians call *lokis* that animal which the Greeks called ἄρκτος, the Latins *ursus,* and the Germans *bär.*

"Now you will understand my motto:

"Miszka su Lokiu,
Abu du tokiu.

"You remember that in the romance of *Renard* the bear is called *damp Brun.* The Slavs called it Michel, which becomes Miszka in Lithuanian, and the surname nearly always replaces the generic name *lokis.* In the same way the French have forgotten their new Latin

word *goupil,* or *gorpil,* and have substituted *renard.* I could quote you endless other instances. . . ."

But Adelaide observed that it was late, and we ought to go to bed.

# THE "VICCOLO" OF MADAM LUCREZIA

# THE "VICCOLO" OF MADAM LUCREZIA

I WAS twenty-three years old when I set out for Rome. My father gave me a dozen letters of introduction, one of which, four pages long, was sealed. It was addressed: "To the Marquise Aldobrandi."

"You must write and tell me if the Marquise is still beautiful," said my father.

Now, from my earliest childhood, I had seen over the mantelpiece in his study a miniature of a very lovely woman, with powdered hair, crowned with ivy, and a tiger skin over her shoulder. Underneath was the inscription, "*Roma,* 18—." The dress struck me as so strange that I had many times asked who the lady was.

"It is a bacchante," was the only answer given me.

But this reply hardly satisfied me. I even suspected a secret beneath it, for, at this simple question, my mother would press her lips together and my father look very serious.

This time, when giving me the sealed letter,

he looked stealthily at the portrait; involuntarily I did the same, and the idea came into my head that the powdered bacchante might perhaps be the Marquise Aldobrandi. As I had begun to understand the world I drew all kinds of conclusions from my mother's expression and my father's looks.

When I reached Rome, the first letter I delivered was the one to the Marquise. She lived in a beautiful palace close to the square of Saint-Mark.

I gave my letter and my card to a servant in yellow livery, who showed me into a vast room, dark and gloomy, and badly furnished. But in all Roman palaces there are pictures by the old masters. This room contained a great number of them, and several were very remarkable.

The first one I examined was a portrait of a woman which I thought was a Leonardo da Vinci. By the magnificence of the frame, and the rosewood easel on which it rested, there was no doubt it was the chief gem of the collection. As the Marquise was long in coming I had plenty of time to look at it. I even carried it to a window to see it in a more favourable light. It was evidently a portrait and not a fancy study, for such a face could not have been imagined: she was a beautiful woman, with rather thick

lips, eyebrows nearly joined, and an expression that was both haughty and endearing. Underneath was her coat of arms, surmounted by a ducal coronet. But what struck me most was the dress, which even to the powder was like that of my father's bacchante.

I was holding the portrait in my hand when the Marquise entered.

"Exactly like his father!" she cried, coming towards me. "Ah, you French! you French! Hardly arrived before he seizes upon 'Madam Lucrezia.'"

I hastened to make excuses for my impertinence, and began to praise at random the *chef-d'œuvre* of Leonardo, which I had been so bold as to lift out of its place.

"It is indeed a Leonardo," said the Marquise, "and it is the portrait of the infamous Lucrezia Borgia. Of all my pictures it was the one your father admired most. . . . But, good heavens! what a resemblance! I think I see your father as he was twenty-five years ago. How is he? What is he doing? And will he not come to see us at Rome some time?"

Although the Marquise did not wear either tiger skin or powdered hair, at the first glance, and with my natural quickness of perception, I recognized in her my father's bacchante. Some

twenty-five years had not been able entirely to efface the traces of great beauty. Her expression only had changed, even as her toilet. She was dressed completely in black, and her treble chin, her grave smile and her manner, serious and yet radiant, apprised me that she had become religious.

No one could have given me a warmer welcome; in a few words she offered me her home, her purse and her friends, among whom she mentioned several cardinals.

"Look upon me," she said, "as your mother."

She lowered her eyes modestly.

"Your father has charged me to look after you and to advise you."

And to show me that she did not intend her office to be a sinecure she began at once to put me on my guard against the dangers Rome had for young men of my age, and exhorted me earnestly to avoid them. I must shun bad company, artists especially, and only associate with people that she chose for me. In fact, I received a lengthy sermon. I replied respectfully, and with conventional hypocrisy.

"I regret that my son the Marquis should be away on our property at Romagna," she said, as I rose to go, "but I will introduce you to my second son, Don Ottavio, who will soon

become a Monsignor. I hope you will like him, and that you will make friends with each other as you ought to. . . ."

She broke off precipitately—

"For you are nearly the same age, and he is a nice steady boy like yourself."

She sent immediately for Don Ottavio, and I was presented to a tall, pale young man, whose downcast, melancholy eyes seemed already conscious of his hypocrisy.

Without giving him time to speak, the Marquise offered me in his name the most ready services. He assented by bowing low at all his mother's suggestions, and it was arranged that he should take me to see the sights of the town on the following day and bring me back to dinner *en famille* at the Aldobrandi palace.

I had hardly gone twenty steps down the road when an imperious voice exclaimed behind me—

"Where are you going alone at this hour, Don Ottavio?"

I turned round and saw a fat priest, who looked me up and down from head to foot with eyes wide open.

"I am not Don Ottavio," I said.

The priest bowed down to the ground, profuse in apologies, and a moment after I saw

him go into the Aldobrandi palace. I continued on my way, not much flattered at being taken for a budding Monsignor.

In spite of the Marquise's warnings, perhaps even because of them, my next most pressing concern was to find out the lodging of a painter I knew, and I spent an hour with him at his studio talking over the legitimate or dubious ways of enjoying oneself that Rome could provide. I led him to the subject of the Aldobrandi.

The Marquise, he said, after being excessively frivolous became highly devotional when she recognized that she was too old for further conquests. Her eldest son was a fool, who spent his time hunting and receiving the rents of the farms on his vast estates. They were going the right way to make an idiot of the second son, Don Ottavio; he was to be a cardinal some day. Until then he was given up to the Jesuits. He never went out alone; he was forbidden to look at a woman, or to take a single step without a priest at his heels, who had educated him for God's service, and who, after having been the Marquise's last *amico,* now ruled her house with almost despotic authority.

The next day Don Ottavio, followed by the Abbé Negroni, he who had taken me for his

pupil the previous evening, came to take me out in a carriage and to offer his services as cicerone.

The first public building we stopped at was a church. Following his priest's example, Don Ottavio knelt down, beat his breast, and made endless signs of the cross. After he had got up he showed me the frescoes and statues, and talked like a man of sense and taste. This was an agreeable surprise to me; we began to talk, and his conversation pleased me. For some time we conversed in Italian, but suddenly he said to me in French—

"My director does not understand a word of your language; let us talk French, and we shall feel freer."

It might be said that change of idiom transformed the young man. There was nothing that smacked of the priest in his talk. I could have imagined him one of our own liberal-minded men. I noticed that he said everything in an even, monotonous tone of voice, which often contrasted strangely with the vivacity of his sentiments. It was, apparently, a ruse to put Negroni off the scent, who from time to time asked us to explain what we were talking about. I need hardly say that our translation was extremely free.

A young man in violet stockings passed us.

"That is one of our modern patricians," said Don Ottavio. "Wretched livery! and it will be mine in a few months! What happiness," he added after a moment's silence—"what happiness to live in a country like yours! If I were French I might perhaps one day have become a deputy."

This high ambition made me feel strongly inclined to laugh, and as the Abbé noticed it, I had to explain that we were talking of the error of an archæologist who mistook a statue by Bernini for an antique.

We dined at the Aldobrandi palace. Directly after the coffee the Marquise asked me to excuse her son, who was obliged to retire to his room to fulfil certain pious duties. I remained alone with her, and the Abbé Negroni leant back in his chair and slept the sleep of the just.

In the meantime the Marquise interrogated me minutely about my father, about Paris, as to my past life, and on my future plans. She seemed to me a good and amiable woman, but rather too inquisitive and over-much concerned about my salvation. But she spoke Italian perfectly, and I took a lesson in pronunciation from her which I promised myself I would repeat.

I often came to see her. Nearly every morning I visited the antiquities with her son and the ever-present Negroni, and in the evenings I dined with them at the Aldobrandi palace. The Marquise entertained very rarely, and then nearly always ecclesiastics.

Once, however, she introduced me to a German lady, who was a recent convert and her intimate friend. She was a certain Madam de Strahlenheim, a very handsome woman who had lived a long while in Rome. Whilst these ladies talked together about a celebrated preacher, I studied, by the lamplight, the portrait of Lucrezia, until I felt it my duty to put in a word.

"What eyes!" I exclaimed, "her eyelids almost seem to move!"

At this somewhat pretentious figure of speech which I ventured on to show myself to Madam Strahlenheim in the light of a connoisseur, she trembled with fear and hid her face in her handkerchief.

"What is the matter, my dear?" said the Marquise.

"Oh! nothing but what Monsieur said just now! . . ."

We pressed her with questions, and when she said that my phrase had recalled a horrible story we compelled her to relate it.

Here it is in a few words:—

Madam de Strahlenheim had a sister-in-law called Wilhelmina, who was betrothed to a young man from Westphalia, Julius de Katzenellenbogen, a volunteer in General Kleist's division. I am very sorry to have to repeat so many barbarous names, but extraordinary episodes never happen except to people with names which are difficult to pronounce.

Julius was a charming fellow, full of patriotic feeling and love of metaphysics. He gave his portrait to Wilhelmina when he entered the army and she gave him hers, which he wore next his heart. They do this sort of thing in Germany.

On the 13th of September, 1813, Wilhelmina was at Cassel. She was sitting in a room, about five o'clock in the afternoon, busy knitting with her mother and sister-in-law. While she worked she looked at her *fiancé's* portrait, which was standing on a little table opposite to her. Suddenly she uttered a terrible cry, put her hand on her heart and fainted. They had the greatest difficulty in the world to bring her back to consciousness, and, as soon as she could speak, she said—

"Julius is dead! He has been killed!"

She insisted that she had seen the portrait

shut its eyes, and at the same instant that she had felt a terrible pain as though a red-hot iron had pierced her heart: her horror-struck countenance gave credence to her words.

Everybody tried to show her that her vision was unreal and that she ought to pay no attention to it. It was of no use. The poor child was inconsolable; she spent the night in tears and wanted to go into mourning the next day, as though quite convinced of the affliction which had been revealed to her. Two days after news came of the bloody battle of Leipzig. Julius wrote to his *fiancée* a letter dated at three o'clock p.m. on the 13th. He had not been wounded, but had distinguished himself, and was just going into Leipzig, where he expected to pass the night in the general's quarters, which were, of course, out of the range of danger. This reassuring letter did not calm Wilhelmina, who noticed that it had been written at three o'clock, and persisted in believing that her beloved had died at five o'clock.

The unhappy girl was not mistaken. It was known that Julius had been sent out of Leipzig with a despatch at half-past four, and that three-quarters of a league from the town, beyond the Elster, a straggler from the enemy's army, concealed in a trench, had fired and killed him. The

bullet pierced his heart and broke the portrait of Wilhelmina.

"And what became of the poor girl?" I asked Madam de Strahlenheim.

"Oh! she has been very ill. She is married now to a gentleman who is a barrister in Werner, and, if you went to Dessau, she would show you Julius's portrait."

"All that was done by the interposition of the devil," the Abbé broke in, for he had only been half asleep during Madam de Strahlenheim's story. "He who could make the heathen oracles speak could easily make the eyes of a portrait move if he thought fit. Not twenty years ago an Englishman was strangled by a statue at Tivoli."

"By a statue!" I exclaimed. "How did that come about?"

"He was a wealthy man who had been making excavations at Tivoli, and had discovered a statue of the Empress Agrippina Messalina . . . it matters little which. Whoever it was he had it taken to his house, and by dint of gazing at it and admiring it he became crazy. All Protestants are more than half mad. He called it his wife, his lady, and kissed it, marble as it was. He said that the statue came to life every evening for his benefit. So true was this

that one morning they found milord stone dead in his bed. Well, would you believe it?—there was another Englishman quite ready to purchase the statue. Now I would have had it made into lime."

When once stories of the supernatural are let loose there is no stopping them. Everybody contributed his share, and I too took part in this collection of fearful tales; to such purpose that when we broke up we were all pretty well scared and full of respect for the devil's power.

I walked back to my lodgings, and, to get into the Corso, I took a little winding lane, down which I had not yet been. It was quite deserted. I could see nothing but long garden walls, or some mean-looking houses, none of which were lighted up. It had just struck midnight, and the weather was threateningly dark. I was in the middle of the street, walking very quickly, when I heard a slight noise above my head, a st! and just at the same time a rose fell at my feet. I raised my eyes and, in spite of the darkness, I saw a woman clothed in white, at a window, with one arm stretched out towards me. Now we French show to great advantage in a strange land, for our forefathers, the conquerors of Europe, have cradled us in the traditions flattering to national pride. I believed religiously in the

susceptibility of all German, Spanish, and Italian ladies at the mere look of a Frenchman. In short, at that period I was still very much of a Frenchman, and, besides, did not the rose tell its own tale plainly enough?

"Madam," I said in a low voice, as I picked up the rose, "you have dropped your nose-gay. . . ."

But the lady had already vanished, and the window had been closed noiselessly. I did what every other man would have done in my position: I looked for the nearest door, which was two steps from the window; I found it, and I waited to have it opened for me. Five minutes passed in a profound silence; then I coughed, then I scratched softly, but the door did not open. I examined it more carefully, hoping to find a lock or latch; to my great surprise I found it padlocked.

"The jealous lover has not gone in yet, then," I said to myself.

I picked up a small stone and threw it against the window; it hit a wooden outside shutter and fell at my feet.

"The devil!" I thought; "Roman ladies must be accustomed to lovers who carry ladders in their pockets; no one told me of the custom."

I waited a few more moments, but fruitlessly.

I thought once or twice I saw the shutter shake lightly from the inside, as though someone wanted to draw it aside to look into the street, but that was all. My patience was exhausted at the end of a quarter of an hour. I lit a cigar and went on my way, but not until I had carefully taken stock of the position occupied by the padlocked house.

The next day, in thinking over this adventure, I arrived at the following conclusions: A young Roman lady, probably a great beauty, had noticed me in my expeditions about the town, and had been attracted by my feeble charms. If she had declared her passion only by the gift of a mysterious flower, it was because she was restrained by a becoming sense of modesty, or perhaps she had been disturbed in her plans by the presence of some duenna, maybe some cursed guardian like Bartolo de Rosina. I decided to lay siege to the house which was inhabited by this infanta.

With this fine idea in my head I left my rooms when I had first given my hair a finishing touch and had put on my new coat and yellow gloves. In this get-up, with my hat tilted over my ear and the faded rose in my buttonhole, I turned my steps toward the street whose name I did not yet know, but which I had no difficulty

in discovering. A notice stuck on a Madonna told me it was called "Il viccolo di Madama Lucrezia."

I was struck by this name at once, and recollected Leonardo da Vinci's portrait, together with the stories of presentiments and witchcraft that I had heard the evening before at the Marquise's. Then I remembered that some matches are made in heaven. Why should not my love be named Lucrezia? Why should she not be like the Lucrezia of the Aldobrandi collection?

It was dawn. I was within two steps of a ravishing young lady, and no sinister thoughts mingled with the emotion I felt.

I came to the house. It was No. 13. What an unlucky omen! . . . Alas! it hardly answered to the idea of it that I had conceived by night. It was certainly no palace, whatever else it might be. The walls surrounding it were blackened with age and covered with lichen, and behind these were some fruit trees badly eaten by caterpillars. In one corner of the inclosure was a pavilion one story high, with two windows looking on to the street; both were closed by old shutters furnished outside with a number of iron bars. The door was low, and over it was an old coat of arms almost worn away; it was shut, as on the previous night, by a large padlock which.

was attached to a chain. Over the door was a notice written in chalk, which read, "House to Let or to be Sold."

However, I had not made a mistake. The houses were too few for confusion to be possible. It was indeed my padlock, and, furthermore, two rose leaves on the pavement, near the door, indicated the exact spot where I had received the evidences of love from my well-beloved, and they also proved that the pavement in front of the house was rarely swept.

I asked several poor people in the neighbourhood if they could tell me where the keeper of this mysterious house lived.

"Not anywhere here," they replied curtly.

My question seemed to displease those to whom I put it; and this piqued my curiosity still further. Going from door to door I finished by going into a kind of dark cave, where was an old woman, who might have been suspected of witchcraft, for she had a black cat and was cooking some mysterious decoction in a cauldron.

"You want to see over the house of Madam Lucrezia?" she said. "I have the key of it."

"All right. Show me over."

"Do you wish to take it?" she asked, smiling with a dubious air.

"Yes, if it suits me."

"It will not suit you; but, see, will you give me a *paul* if I show it you?"

"Most willingly."

Upon this assurance she rose slowly from her stool, unhooked a very rusty key from the wall, and led me to No. 13.

"Why," I said, "do they call this the house of Lucrezia?"

"Why are you called a foreigner?" retorted the old woman, chuckling. "Is it not because you *are* a foreigner?"

"Certainly. But who was this Madam Lucrezia? Was she a Roman lady?"

"What! you come to Rome without knowing Madam Lucrezia? I will tell you her history when we are inside. But here is another devilish trick! I do not know what has come to this key—it will not turn. You try it."

Indeed, the padlock and the key had not seen each other for a long time. Nevertheless, by means of three or four oaths and much grinding of my teeth, I succeeded in turning the lock; but I tore my yellow gloves and strained the palm of my hand. We entered upon a dark passage, which led to several low rooms.

The curiously decorated ceilings were covered with cobwebs, under which traces of gilding could dimly be seen. By the damp smell which

pervaded every room it was evident they had not been occupied for a long time. There was not a single stick of furniture in them, only some strips of old leather hung down the saltpetred walls. From the carving of some consoles and the shape of the chimney-pieces I concluded that the house dated from the fifteenth century, and it is probable that at one time it had been tastefully decorated. The windows had little square panes of glass, most of which were broken; they looked into the garden, where I noticed a rose tree in flower, some fruit trees, and a quantity of broccoli.

When I had wandered through all the rooms on the ground floor, I went upstairs to the story from where I had seen my mysterious being. The old woman tried to keep me back by telling me there was nothing to see and that the staircase was in a very bad state. Seeing I was headstrong, she followed me, but with marked aversion. The rooms on this floor were very much like the others, only they were not so damp, and the floors and windows also were in a better state. In the last room that I entered I saw a large armchair covered with black leather, which, strangely enough, was not covered with dust. I sat down in it, and finding it comfortable enough in which to hear a story, I asked

the old woman to tell me the history of Madam Lucrezia; but, in order to refresh her memory, I first gave her a present of several *pauls*. She cleared her throat, blew her nose, and began the following story:—

"In heathen times, when Alexander was Emperor, he had a daughter, who was as beautiful as the day. She was called Madam Lucrezia. Stop—there she is! . . ."

I turned round quickly. The old woman was pointing to a carved console which upheld the chief beam of the room. It was a very roughly carved siren.

"Goodness!" went on the old woman, "how she loved to enjoy herself! And, as her father found fault with her, she had this house built.

"Every night she left the Quirinal and came here to amuse herself. She stood at that window, and when a fine cavalier, such as yourself, Monsieur, passed by in the street, she called to him, and I leave you to guess if he was well received. But most men are chattering magpies, and they could have done her great harm by their babbling, so she took care to guard herself. When she had made her adieu to her lover, her armed attendants filled the staircase by which we came up. They despatched you, and then buried you

among the cabbages! Yes, many of their bones are found in the garden!

"This establishment went on for a long time, but one evening her brother, Sisto Tarquino, passed under the window. She did not recognise him, and she called to him. He came up. In the dark all cats look gray, and he was treated like all the others. But he had left his handkerchief behind, and his name was upon it.

"Despair seized her as soon as she saw the mischief she had done. She immediately unwound her garter and hung herself from that beam up there. What an example for young people!"

While the old woman was thus confusing the ages, mixing up the Tarquins with the Borgias, I had my eyes fixed on the flooring. I had discovered several rose petals still quite fresh, which gave me plenty to think of.

"Who attends to this garden?" I asked the old woman.

"My son, Monsieur, gardener to M. Vanozzi, who has the next garden. M. Vanozzi is always away in the Maremma; and he hardly ever comes to Rome. That is why the garden is not very nicely kept. My son goes with him, and I am afraid they will not come back for a very long time," she added, with a sigh.

"He is busily employed, then, with M. Vanozzi."

"Oh, he is a queer man—busy over too many things. I am afraid he spends his time in a bad way. . . . Ah, my poor boy!"

She took a step towards the door as though she wanted to change the conversation.

"No one lives here, then?" I resumed, stopping her.

"Not a single creature."

"And why is that?"

She shrugged her shoulders.

"Listen to me," I said, as I gave her a piastre. "Tell me the truth. A woman comes here."

"A woman? Good Lord!"

"Yes; I saw her yesterday evening and I spoke to her."

"Holy Mother!" cried the old dame, and she rushed to the staircase; "it must be Madam Lucrezia! Let us go! let us go, Monsieur! They certainly told me she walked here by night, but I did not wish to tell it you for fear of injuring the landlord, because I thought you wished to rent it."

It was out of the question to keep her there; she hurried out of the house, anxious, she said, "to light a candle in the nearest church."

I went out too, and let her go, hopeless of learning anything more from her.

You will readily guess that I did not relate my adventures at the Aldobrandi palace; the Marquise was too prudish, and Don Ottavio too much taken up with politics to be a useful adviser in a love affair. But I went to my artist friend, who knew Rome from end to end, and asked him what he thought of it.

"I think you have seen the ghost of Lucrezia Borgia," he said. "What a danger you have run into! She was dangerous enough when she was alive; imagine how much more she must be now she is dead! It makes me shudder to think of it."

"You are surely half joking?"

"So Monsieur is an atheist and a philosopher and does not believe in the most orthodox explanations. Very well, then. What do you say to another hypothesis? Suppose the old woman lets the house to women who are equal to accosting men who pass by in the street; there are old women sufficiently depraved to drive such a trade."

"Wonderful," I said. "Then I must look like a saint, for the old dame never suggested any such offers. You insult me. Besides, my friend, remember the furnishing of the house:

a man must be possessed by the devil to be satisfied with it."

"Then it is a ghost, there can be no doubt about it. But wait a bit, I have still another idea. You have mistaken the house—ah! that is it; near a garden? With a little low door to it. . . . Why, that is my dear friend Rosina's! Eighteen months ago she was the ornament of that street. It is true she has become blind in one eye, but that is a trifle. . . . She still has a very lovely profile."

None of these explanations satisfied me. When evening came I walked slowly past the house of Lucrezia, but I did not see anything. I went up and down past it with no further result. Three or four evenings followed, and I danced attendance under her windows as I went home from the Aldobrandi palace, with ever the same want of success. I had begun to forget the mysterious occupant of No. 13, when, passing towards midnight through the lane, I distinctly heard a woman's light laugh behind the shutter of the window at which the giver of the flowers had appeared to me. Twice I heard that little laugh, and I could not prevent feeling slightly afraid, when just at that moment I saw come out at the other end of the street a group of penitents, closely hooded, with

tapers in hand, bearing a corpse to burial. When they had gone by I took up my stand once more under the window; but this time I did not hear anything. I tried to throw pebbles; and I even called out more or less loudly; but still no one appeared; and, a heavy shower coming on, I was obliged to beat a retreat.

I am ashamed to tell how many times I stood before that accursed house without succeeding in solving the riddle that tormented me. Once only did I pass along the Viccolo di Madama Lucrezia with Don Ottavio and his ubiquitous Abbé.

"That is the house of Lucrezia," I said.

I saw him change colour.

"Yes," he replied; "a very dubious popular tradition asserts that Lucrezia Borgia's little house was here. If those walls could speak, what horrors they could reveal to us! Nevertheless, my friend, when I compare those times with our own I am seized with regrets. Under Alexander VI. there were still Romans. Now there are none. Cæsar Borgia was a monster; but he was a great man. He tried to turn the barbarians out of Italy; and perhaps, if his father had lived, he might have accomplished his great design. Oh! if only Heaven would send us a tyrant like Borgia to deliver us

from these human despots who are degrading us!"

When Don Ottavio threw himself into the realms of politics it was impossible to stop him. We were at the Piazza del Popolo before his panegyric in favour of enlightened despotism was concluded; but we were a thousand miles from the subject of my Lucrezia.

One night, when I was very late in paying my respects to the Marquise, she told me her son was unwell, and begged me to go up to his room. I found him lying on his bed, still dressed, reading a French journal which I had sent him that morning concealed between the leaves of a volume of the Fathers. An edition of the Holy Fathers had for some time served us for those communications which he had to conceal from the Abbé and the Marquise. On the day when the *Courier de France* appeared I received a folio Father. I returned another, in which I slipped a newspaper, lent me by the Ambassador's secretary. This gave the Marquise an exalted notion of my piety; and also his director, who often wanted to make me discuss theology with him.

When I had talked for some time with Don Ottavio, and had noticed that he seemed so much upset that not even politics could attract his at-

tention, I recommended him to undress, and I bade him adieu. It was cold, and I had no coat with me; Don Ottavio pressed me to take his, and in accepting it I received a lesson in the difficult art of wearing a cloak in the proper Roman fashion.

I left the Aldobrandi palace muffled up to the eyes. I had gone but few steps on the pavement of the Square of Saint-Mark when a peasant, whom I had noticed seated on a bench by the gate of the palace, came up to me and held out a crumpled bit of paper.

"Read it, for the love of God!" he said, and quickly disappeared, running at top speed.

I took the paper, and looked round for a light by which to read it. By the light of a lamp which was burning before a Madonna I saw it was a pencilled note, and written apparently in a trembling hand. I had much difficulty in making out the following words:—

"Do not come to-night, or we are lost! All is known except your name. Nothing can sever us.—Your LUCREZIA."

"Lucrezia!" I cried, "Lucrezia again! What devilish mystification underlies all this? 'Do not come.' But, my good lady, what road must I take to find you out?"

While I was cogitating over the contents of

this note I mechanically took the road to the Viccolo di Madama Lucrezia, and soon found myself in front of No. 13.

The street was deserted as usual, and only the sound of my footsteps disturbed the profound silence which reigned all round. I stopped and looked up at the well-known window. This time I was not mistaken: the shutter was pushed back and the window was wide open.

I thought I saw a human shape standing out from the dark background of the room.

"Lucrezia, is it you?" I said in a low voice.

No one answered, but I heard a clicking noise, the cause of which I could not at first understand.

"Lucrezia, are you there?" I repeated rather louder.

At the same instant I received a sharp blow in the chest, followed by the sound of a report, and down I went on the pavement.

"Take that from the Signora Lucrezia!" cried out a hoarse voice, and the shutter was noiselessly closed.

I soon staggered to my feet, and the first thing I did was to feel myself all over, as I expected to find a big hole in my body. The cloak and my coat were both pierced, but the ball had been blunted by the folds of the cloth, and

I had escaped with nothing worse than a nasty bruise.

The idea that a second shot might not be long in coming made me drag myself close up to the side of this inhospitable house, and I squeezed close to the walls, so that I could not be seen.

I took myself off as quickly as I could, still panting, when a man whom I had not noticed behind me took my arm and asked me anxiously if I were hurt.

By the voice I recognised Don Ottavio. It was not the moment to question him, however surprised I was to see him alone and in the street at that time of night. I told him briefly that I had just been fired at from a window, but that I was only grazed.

"It is a mistake!" he cried. "But I hear people coming. Can you walk? If we are seen together I shall be lost; but I will not abandon you."

He took my arm and led me along at a rapid pace. We walked, or rather ran, as fast as I could manage; but I was soon obliged to sit down on a stump to get my breath.

Happily we were by that time not far from a large house where a ball was being given; there were numbers of carriages in front of the door,

and Don Ottavio went to find one, then he put me inside and conducted me to my hotel. After a good drink of water I felt quite restored and related to him minutely all that had happened in front of that fatal house, from the gift of the rose to that of the bullet.

He listened with his head bent down, half hidden behind one of his hands. When I showed him the note that I had received, he seized it and read it eagerly.

"It is a mistake! A wretched mistake!" he exclaimed again.

"You will admit, my dear fellow," I said to him, "that it is extremely disagreeable for both of us. I might have been killed, and there are about a dozen holes in your fine cloak. Good gracious! how jealous your fellow-countrymen are!"

Don Ottavio shook hands with me, looking the picture of woe, and re-read the note without answering.

"Do try," I said, "to offer me some explanation of this affair. Devil take it if I can make anything of it!"

He shrugged his shoulders.

"At least tell me what I ought to do," I said; "to whom I should address my grievances in this pious town of yours, in order to see justice

done to this gentleman who peppers passers-by without even asking them their names. I confess I should love to see him hanged."

"Be very careful," he cried. "You do not know this country. Do not say a word to anyone of what has happened, or you will expose yourself too much."

"What shall I expose myself to? Damn it! I mean to have my revenge. If I had offended the scoundrel there might be some excuse; but, because I picked up a rose . . . In all conscience, surely I did not deserve to be shot."

"Let me act in the matter," said Don Ottavio; "perhaps I shall succeed in clearing up the mystery. But I ask you as a special favour, as a signal proof of your friendship for me, not to mention this to a single soul. Will you promise me?"

He looked so sad as he entreated that I had not the heart to resist him, and I promised him all he asked. He thanked me effusively, and, when he had himself applied a compress of eau de Cologne to my chest, he shook hands and bade me adieu.

"By the way," I asked him, as I opened the door to let him go out, "tell me how it happened that you were there just in the nick of time to help me."

"I heard the gunshot," he replied in an embarrassed tone, "and I came out at once, fearing some mischance had happened to you."

He left me hastily, after he had again sworn me to secrecy.

In the morning a surgeon same to see me, sent no doubt by Don Ottavio. He prescribed a poultice, but asked no questions about the cause that had added violet marks to my white skin. People are very discreet in Rome, and I desired to conform to the customs of the country.

Several days passed by without my being able to talk freely with Don Ottavio. He was preoccupied and even more gloomy than usual; besides, he seemed to try to avoid my questionings. During the rare moments that I was alone with him he did not say a word about the strange inhabitants of the Viccolo di Madama Lucrezia. The day fixed for the ceremony of his ordination drew near, and I attributed his melancholy to his repugnance to the profession he was being forced to adopt.

I prepared to leave Rome for Florence. When I announced my departure to the Marquise Aldobrandi, Don Ottavio made some excuse to take me up to his room. When we reached it he took both my hands in his—

"My dear friend," he said, "if you will not grant me the favour I am going to ask you I shall certainly blow out my brains, for I see no other way out of my difficulties. I have quite made up my mind never to wear the wretched dress they want me to adopt. I want to escape out of this country. I ask you to take me with you, and to let me pass as your servant; it will only need one word added to your passport to facilitate my flight."

At first I tried to turn him from his design by speaking of the grief it would cause his mother; but, finding his resolution was firmly fixed, I ended by promising to take him with me, and to have my passport altered accordingly.

"That is not all," he said. "My departure still depends on the success of an enterprise on which I am engaged. You must set out the day after to-morrow; by then I may have succeeded, and then I shall be completely at your service."

"Are you so foolish," I asked uneasily, "as to get yourself entangled in some conspiracy?"

"No," he replied; "the matter is not quite of such grave importance as the fate of my country, but grave enough for my life and happiness to depend on the success of my under-

taking. I can not tell you any more now. In a couple of days you shall know everything."

I had begun to get used to mysteries, so I resigned myself to yet another. It was arranged that we should start at three o'clock in the morning, and that we should not break our journey until we reached Tuscan territory.

As I knew it would be useless to go to bed with such an early start in prospect, I employed the last evening of my stay in Rome in paying calls at all the houses where I had received hospitality. I went to take leave of the Marquise, and for form's sake I shook hands ceremoniously with her son. I felt his hand tremble in mine.

"At this moment my life is a game of pitch and toss," he whispered. "You will find a letter at your hotel from me. If I am not with you punctually at three o'clock, do not wait for me."

I was struck by the alteration in his features, but I attributed it to a very natural emotion on his part at leaving his family possibly for ever.

It was nearly one o'clock when I regained my lodgings. I felt a desire to walk along the Viccolo di Madama Lucrezia once more. Something white hung from the window which had been the scene of two such different visions. I approached it cautiously, and saw that it was a

knotted rope. Was it an invitation to bid farewell to the Signora? It looked like it, and the temptation was strong. I did not yield to it, however, but recollected my promise to Don Ottavio; and also, it must be confessed, the disagreeable reception I had brought on myself some days ago by an act that was nothing like as bold.

I continued on my way slowly, for I was sorry to lose the last opportunity of penetrating the mysteries of No. 13. I turned my head at each step that I took, expecting every time to see some human being climb up or descend the cord. Nothing appeared, and at length I got to the far end of the lane which led into the Corso.

"Farewell, Madam Lucrezia," I said, and I took off my hat to the house which I could still see. "Find out someone else, I beg you, to help you to avenge yourself on the jealous lover who keeps you imprisoned there."

It was striking two o'clock when I entered my hotel. A carriage loaded with luggage stood waiting in the yard. One of the hotel waiters gave me a letter; it was from Don Ottavio, and, as it looked a long one, I thought I had better take it up to my room to read, so I asked the waiter to light me upstairs.

"Monsieur," he said, "your servant, whom you told us was going to travel with you . . ."

"Well? Has he come?"

"No, Monsieur . . ."

"He is at the inn, and will come with the horses."

"Monsieur, a lady came a little while ago and asked to speak to your servant. She absolutely insisted on going up to your room, Monsieur, and told me to tell your servant as soon as he came that Madam Lucrezia was in your room."

"In my room!" I cried, clutching hold of the bannister rail.

"Yes, Monsieur; and it looks as though she were going too, for she gave me a small box to put in the boot."

My heart beat loudly, and superstitious terror and curiosity possessed me in turn. I went up the stairs step by step. When I reached the first landing (my rooms were on the second floor), the waiter, who was in front of me, tripped, and the candle which he held in his hand was extinguished. He begged pardon profoundly, and went downstairs to relight it. I still climbed on.

I had my hand on the key of my room, but I hesitated. What fresh vision should I see?

More than once, in the darkness, the story of the bleeding nun had returned to me. Was I possessed by a demon, even as was Don Alonso? The waiter seemed a terribly long time in coming.

I opened the door. Heaven have mercy on us! there was a light in my bedroom. I rapidly crossed the little sitting-room which came first and a single glance sufficed to show me no one was in my bedroom; but immediately I heard light steps behind me, and the rustle of skirts. I believe my hair stood on end as I turned round suddenly.

A woman, dressed in white, her head covered with a black mantilla, rushed to me with outstretched arms.

"Here you are at last, my beloved!" she cried, as she seized my hands.

Hers were as cold as ice, and her features were as pale as death. I started back against the wall.

"Holy Mother! It is not he! . . . Oh, Monsieur, are you Don Ottavio's friend?"

At that name all was made clear. In spite of her pallor the young lady did not look like a ghost; she lowered her eyes, a thing ghosts never do, and held her hands clasped in a modest attitude before her girdle, which made me think

that my friend Don Ottavio was not so much of a politician as I had imagined. In short, it was high time to take Lucrezia away; and, unfortunately, the rôle of confidant was the only one deputed to me in this adventure.

A moment after Don Ottavio arrived, disguised. The horses came too; and we set off. Lucrezia had no passport; but a woman, especially a pretty one, raises no suspicions. One gendarme, however, raised difficulties. I told him he was a hero, and had assuredly served under the great Napoleon. He acknowledged the fact, and I offered him a portrait of that great man on a golden coin, telling him that it was my habit to travel with a lady friend to keep me company; and that, as I very frequently changed them, I did not think it any use to put their names on my passport.

"This one," I added, "leaves me at the next town. I am told that I shall find many others there who could take her place."

"You would do wrong to change her," said the gendarme, as he respectfully shut the carriage door.

To tell you the truth, Madam, this rascal of a Don Ottavio had entered upon terms of friendship with a lovely young lady. She was the sister of a certain wealthy planter named Van-

ozzi, who earned a bad name for himself for being very stingy, and carrying on illicit trade. Don Ottavio knew very well that, even if his family had not intended him for the Church, they would never have consented to let him marry a girl so much lower in social position than himself.

Love is ingenious. The Abbé Negroni's pupil succeeded in holding a secret correspondence with his beloved. Every night he escaped from the Aldobrandi palace, and, as he had not dared to scale the walls of Vanozzi's house, the two lovers arranged to meet in Madam Lucrezia's house, which was protected by its ill-repute. A little door hidden by a fig tree communicated between the two gardens. They were young and in love, and Lucrezia and Ottavio did not complain of the paucity of furnishing, which consisted, as I think I have already pointed out, of an old leather-covered armchair.

One night, when waiting for Don Ottavio, Lucrezia mistook me for him, and made me the present which I received in his place. There was certainly some resemblance between Don Ottavio's figure and appearance and my own, and some scandal-mongers, who knew my father in Rome, maintained that there were reasons for this likeness. In course of time the accursed brother discovered their meetings; but his threats

did not make Lucrezia reveal her seducer's name. We know how he took vengeance and how I was to pay their debt. It is needless to tell you how the two lovers took steps respectively to set themselves free.

To conclude. We all three arrived at Florence. Don Ottavio married Lucrezia, and they left immediately for Paris. My father gave him as warm a welcome as I had received at the hands of the Marquise. He took upon him to bring about a reconciliation, and after a good deal of trouble he succeeded. The Marquis Aldobrandi was opportunely taken with Roman fever and died; so Ottavio inherited his title and fortune, and I became godfather to his firstborn.

27*th April,* 1846.

# THE BLUE CHAMBER

*La Chambre Bleue*

## THE BLUE CHAMBER

*To Madame de la Rhune*

A YOUNG man was walking up and down the waiting-room of a railway station, in an agitated condition. He wore blue spectacles, and, although he had not a cold, he used his pocket-handkerchief incessantly. He held a little black bag in his left hand which, as I learnt later, contained a silk dressing-gown and a pair of Turkish pantaloons.

Every now and again he went to the door and looked into the street, then he drew out his watch and consulted the station clock. The train did not leave for an hour; but there are people who always imagine they will be late. This train was not for people in a pressing hurry; there were very few first-class carriages on it. It was not an hour at which stock-brokers left, after business was finished, to go to their country homes for dinner. When travellers began to appear, a Parisian would have recognised from their bearing that they were either farmers, or

small suburban tradesmen. Nevertheless, every time anyone came into the station, or a carriage drew up at the door, the heart of the young man with the blue spectacles became inflated like a balloon, his knees trembled, his bag almost fell from his hands, and his glasses off his nose, where, we may mention in passing, they were seated crookedly.

His agitation increased when, after a long wait, a woman appeared by a side door, from precisely the direction in which he had not kept a constant lookout. She was dressed in black with a thick veil over her face, and she held a brown morocco leather bag in her hand, containing, as I subsequently discovered, a wondrous morning-gown and blue satin slippers. The woman and the young man advanced towards each other looking to right and left, but never in front of them. They came up to one another, shook hands, and stood several minutes without speaking a word, trembling and gasping, a prey to one of those intense emotions for which I would give in exchange a hundred years of a philosopher's life.

"Léon," said the young woman, when she had summoned up courage to speak (I had forgotten to mention that she was young and pretty)—"Léon, what a happy thought! I

should never have recognised you with those blue spectacles."

"What a happy thought!" said Léon. "I should never have known you under that black veil."

"What a happy thought!" she repeated. "Let us be quick and take our seats; suppose the train were to start without us! . . ." (and she squeezed his arm tightly). "No one will suspect us. I am now with Clara and her husband, on the way to their country house, where, *to-morrow,* I must say good-bye to her; . . . and," she added, laughing and lowering her head, "she left an hour ago; and to-morrow, . . . after passing *the last evening* with her, . . . (again she pressed his arm), to-morrow, in the morning, she will leave me at the station, where I shall meet Ursula, whom I sent on ahead to my aunt's. . . . Oh! I have arranged everything. Let us take our tickets. . . . They can not possibly guess who we are. Oh! suppose they ask our names at the inn? I have forgotten them already. . . ."

"Monsieur and Madame Duru."

"Oh no! Not Duru. There was a shoemaker called that at the pension."

"Dumont, then?"

"Daumont."

"Very well. But no one will ask us."

The bell rang, the door of the waiting-room opened, and the carefully veiled young woman rushed into a carriage with her youthful companion. The bell rang a second time, and the door of their compartment was closed.

"We are alone!" they exclaimed delightedly.

But, almost at the same moment, a man of about fifty, dressed completely in black, with a grave and bored expression, entered the carriage and settled himself in a corner. The engine whistled, and the train began to move. The two young people drew back as far as they could from their unwelcome neighbour and began to whisper in English as an additional precaution.

"Monsieur," said the other traveller, in the same tongue, and with a much purer British accent, "if you have secrets to tell to each other, you had better not tell them in English before me, for I am an Englishman. I am extremely sorry to annoy you; but there was only a single man in the other compartment, and I make it a rule never to travel alone with one man only. . . . He had the face of a Judas and this might have tempted him."

He pointed to his travelling-bag, which he had thrown in before him on the cushion.

" But I shall read if I do not go to sleep."

And, indeed, he did make a gallant effort to sleep. He opened his bag, drew out a comfortable cap, put it on his head, and kept his eyes shut for several minutes; then he reopened them with a gesture of impatience, searched in his bag for his spectacles, then for a Greek book. At length he settled himself to read, with an air of deep attention. While getting his book out of the bag he displaced many things piled up hap-hazard. Among others, he drew out of the depths of the bag a large bundle of Bank of England notes, placed it on the seat opposite him, and, before putting it back in the bag, he showed it to the young man, and asked him if there was a place in N—— where he could change bank-notes.

" Probably, as it is on the route to England."

N—— was the place to which the young people were going. There is quite a tidy little hotel at N——, where people seldom stop except on Saturday evenings. It is held out that the rooms are good, but the host and his helpers are far enough away from Paris to indulge in this provincial vice. The young man whom I have already called by the name of Léon, had been recommended to this hotel some time previously, when he was minus blue spectacles, and, upon his

recommendation, his companion and friend had seemed desirous of visiting it.

She was, moreover, at that time in such a condition of mind that the walls of a prison would have seemed delightful, if they had enclosed Léon with her.

In the meantime the train journeyed on; the Englishman read his Greek book, without looking towards his companions, who conversed in that low tone that only lovers can hear. Perhaps I shall not astonish my readers when I tell them that these two were lovers in the fullest acceptation of the term, and what was still more deplorable, they were not married, because there were reasons which placed an obstacle in the way of their desire.

They reached N——, and the Englishman got out first. Whilst Léon helped his friend to descend from the carriage without showing her legs, a man jumped on to the platform from the next compartment. He was pale, even sallow; his eyes were sunken and bloodshot, and his beard unkempt, a sign by which great criminals are often detected. His dress was clean, but worn almost threadbare. His coat, once black, but now grey at the back and by the elbows, was buttoned up to his chin, probably to hide a waistcoat still more shabby. He went up

to the Englishman and put on a deferential tone.

"Uncle!" he said.

"Leave me alone, you wretch!" cried the Englishman, whose grey eyes flashed with anger; and he took a step forward to leave the station.

"Don't drive me to despair," replied the other, with a piteous and yet at the same time menacing accent.

"Will you be good enough to hold my bag for a moment?" said the old Englishman, throwing his travelling-bag at Léon's feet.

He then took the man who had accosted him by the arm, and led, or rather pushed, him into a corner, where he hoped they would not be overheard, and there he seemed to address him roughly for a moment. He then drew some papers from his pocket, crumpled them up, and put them in the hand of the man who had called him uncle. The latter took the papers without offering any thanks, and almost immediately took himself off and disappeared.

As there is but the one hotel in N—— it was not surprising that, after a short interval, all the characters of this veracious story met together there. In France every traveller who has the good fortune to have a well-dressed wife on his arm is certain to obtain the best room in any

hotel; so firmly is it believed that we are the politest nation in Europe.

If the bedroom that was assigned to Léon was the best, it would be rash to conclude that it was perfect. It had a great walnut bedstead, with chintz curtains, on which was printed in violet the magic story of Pyramis and Thisbé. The walls were covered with a coloured paper representing a view of Naples and a multitude of people; unfortunately, idle and impertinent visitors had drawn moustaches and pipes to all the figures, both male and female, and many silly things had been scribbled in lead-pencil in rhyme and prose on the sky and ocean. Upon this background hung several engravings: "Louis Philippe taking the Oath of the Charter of 1830," "The first Interview between Julia and Saint-Preux," "Waiting for Happiness," and "Regrets," after M. Dubuffe. This room was called the Blue Chamber, because the two arm-chairs to left and right of the fireplace were upholstered in Utrecht velvet of that colour; but for a number of years they had been covered with wrappers of grey glazed calico edged with red braid.

Whilst the hotel servants crowded round the new arrival and offered their services, Léon, who, although in love, was not destitute of com-

mon sense, went to order dinner. It required all his eloquence and various kinds of bribes to extract the promise of a dinner by themselves alone. Great was his dismay when he learnt that in the principal dining-room, which was next his room, the officers of the 3rd Hussars, who were about to relieve the officers of the 3rd Chasseurs at N——, were going to join at a farewell dinner that very day, which would be a lively affair. The host swore by all his gods that, except a certain amount of gaiety which was natural to every French soldier, the officers of the Hussars and Chasseurs were known throughout the town for their gentlemanly and discreet behaviour, and that their proximity would not inconvenience madam in the least; the officers were in the habit of rising from table before midnight.

As Léon went back to the Blue Chamber but slightly reassured, he noticed that the Englishman occupied the other room next his. The door was open, and the Englishman sat at a table upon which were a glass and a bottle. He was looking at the ceiling with profound attention, as though he were counting the flies walking on it.

"What matter if they are so near," said Léon to himself. "The Englishman will soon be tipsy, and the Hussars will leave before midnight."

On entering the Blue Chamber his first care was to make sure that the communicating doors were tightly locked, and that they had bolts to them. There were double doors on the Englishman's side, and the walls were thick. The partition was thinner on the Hussars' side, but the door had a lock and a bolt. After all, this was a more effectual barrier to curiosity than the blinds of a carriage, and how many people think they are hidden from the world in a hackney carriage!

Assuredly the most opulent imagination could certainly never have pictured a more complete state of happiness than that of these two young lovers, who, after waiting so long, found themselves alone and far away from jealous and prying eyes, preparing to relate their past sufferings at their ease and to taste the delights of a perfect reunion. But the devil always finds out a way to pour his drop of wormwood into the cup of happiness.

Johnson was not the first who wrote—he took it from a Greek writer—that no man could say, "To-day I shall be happy." This truth was recognised at a very remote period by the greatest philosophers, and yet is ignored by a certain number of mortals, and especially by most lovers.

Whilst taking a poorly served dinner in the

Blue Chamber from some dishes filched from the Hussars' and the Chasseurs' banquet, Léon and his lover were much disturbed by the conversation in which the gentlemen in the neighbouring room were engaged. They held forth on abstruse subjects concerning strategy and tactics, which I shall refrain from repeating.

There were a succession of wild stories—nearly all of them broad and accompanied by shrieks of laughter, in which it was often difficult for our lovers not to join. Léon's friend was no prude; but there are things one prefers not to hear, particularly during a tête-à-tête with the man one loves. The situation became more and more embarrassing, and when they were taking in the officers' dessert, Léon felt he must go downstairs to beg the host to tell the gentlemen that he had an invalid wife in the room adjoining theirs, and they would deem it a matter of courtesy if a little less noise were made.

The noise was nothing out of the way for a regimental dinner, and the host was taken aback and did not know what to reply. Just when Léon gave his message for the officers, a waiter asked for champagne for the Hussars, and a maidservant for port wine for the Englishman.

"I told him there was none," she added.

"You are a fool. I have every kind of wine. I will go and find him some. Port is it? Bring me the bottle of ratafia, a bottle of quince and a small decanter of brandy."

When the host had concocted the port in a trice, he went into the large dining-room to execute Léon's commission, which at first roused a furious storm.

Then a deep voice, which dominated all the others, asked what kind of a woman their neighbour was. There was a brief silence before the host replied—

"Really, gentlemen, I do not know how to answer you. She is very pretty and very shy. Marie-Jeanne says she has a wedding-ring on her finger. She is probably a bride come here on her honeymoon, as so many others come here."

"A bride?" exclaimed forty voices. "She must come and clink glasses with us! We will drink to her health and teach the husband his conjugal duties!"

At these words there was a great jingling of spurs, and our lovers trembled, fearing that their room was about to be taken by storm. All at once a voice was raised which stopped the manœuvre. It evidently belonged to a commanding officer. He reproached the officers with their want of politeness, ordered them to sit

down again and to talk decently, without shouting. Then he added some words too low to be heard in the Blue Chamber. He was listened to with deference, but, nevertheless, not without exciting a certain amount of covert hilarity. From that moment there was comparative quiet in the officers' room; and our lovers, blessing the salutary reign of discipline, began to talk together with more freedom. . . . But after such confusion it was a little time before they regained that peace of mind which anxiety, the worries of travelling, and, worse than all, the loud merriment of their neighbours, had so greatly agitated. This was not very difficult to accomplish, however, at their age, and they had very soon forgotten all the troubles of their adventurous expedition in thinking of its more important consequences.

They thought peace was declared with the Hussars. Alas! it was but a truce. Just when they expected it least, when they were a thousand leagues away from this sublunary world, twenty-four trumpets, supported by several trombones, struck up the air well known to French soldiers, "La victoire est nous!" How could anyone withstand such a tempest? The poor lovers might well complain.

* * * * *

But they had not much longer to complain, for at the end the officers left the dining-room, filed past the door of the Blue Chamber with a great clattering of spurs and sabres, and shouted one after the other—

"Good night, madam bride!"

Then all noise stopped. No, I am mistaken; the Englishman came out into the passage and cried out—

"Waiter! bring me another bottle of the same port."

Quiet was restored in the hotel of N——. The night was fine and the moon at the full. From time immemorial lovers have been pleased to gaze at our satellite. Léon and his lover opened their window, which looked on a small garden, and breathed with delight the fresh air, which was filled with the scent of a bower of clematis.

They had not looked out long, however, before a man came to walk in the garden. His head was bowed, his arms crossed, and he had a cigar in his mouth. Léon thought he recognised the nephew of the Englishman who was fond of good port wine.

* * * * *

I dislike useless details, and, besides, I do not feel called upon to tell the reader things

he can readily imagine, nor to relate all that happened hour by hour in the inn at N——. I will merely say that the candle which burned on the fireless mantelpiece of the Blue Chamber was more than half consumed when a strange sound issued from the Englishman's room, in which there had been silence until now; it was like the fall of a heavy body. To this noise was added a kind of cracking, quite as odd, followed by a smothered cry and several inarticulate words like an oath. The two young occupants of the Blue Chamber shuddered. Perhaps they had been waked up suddenly by it. The noise seemed a sinister one to both of them, for they could not explain it.

"Our friend the Englishman is dreaming," said Léon, trying to force a smile.

But although he wanted to reassure his companion, he shivered involuntarily. Two or three minutes afterwards a door in the corridor opened cautiously, as it seemed, then closed very quietly. They heard a slow and unsteady footstep which appeared to be trying to disguise its gait.

"What a cursed inn!" exclaimed Léon.

"Ah, it is a paradise!" replied the young woman, letting her head fall on Léon's shoulder. "I am dead with sleep. . . ."

She sighed, and was very soon fast asleep again.

A famous moralist has said that men are never garrulous when they have all their heart's desire. It is not surprising, therefore, that Léon made no further attempt to renew the conversation or to discourse upon the noises in the hotel at N——. Nevertheless, he was preoccupied, and his imagination pieced together many events to which in another mood he would have paid no attention. The evil countenance of the Englishman's nephew returned to his memory. There was hatred in the look that he threw at his uncle even while he spoke humbly to him, doubtless because he was asking for money.

What would be easier than for a man, still young and vigorous, and desperate besides, to climb from the garden to the window of the next room? Moreover, he was staying at the hotel, and would walk in the garden after dark, perhaps . . . quite possibly . . . undoubtedly, he knew that his uncle's black bag contained a thick bundle of bank-notes. . . . And that heavy blow, like the blow of a club on a bald head! . . . that stifled cry! . . . that fearful oath! and those steps afterwards! That nephew looked like an assassin. . . . But people do not assassinate in a hotel full of

officers. Surely the Englishman, like a wise man, had locked himself in, specially knowing the rogue was about. . . . He evidently mistrusted him, since he had not wished to accost him bag in hand. . . . But why allow such hideous thoughts when one is so happy?

Thus did Léon cogitate to himself. In the midst of his thoughts, which I will refrain from analysing at greater length, and which passed in his mind like so many confused dreams, he fixed his eyes mechanically on the door of communication between the Blue Chamber and the Englishman's room.

In France, doors fit badly. Between this one and the floor there was a space of nearly an inch. Suddenly, from this space, which was hardly lighted by the reflection from the polished floor, there appeared something blackish and flat, like a knife blade, for the edge which the candle-light caught showed a thin line which shone brightly. It moved slowly in the direction of a little blue satin slipper, which had been carelessly thrown close to this door. Was it some insect like a centipede? . . . No, it was no insect. It had no definite shape. . . . Two or three brown streams, each with its line of light on its edges, had come through into the room. Their pace quickened, for the floor was a slop-

ing one. . . . They came on rapidly and touched the little slipper. There was no longer any doubt! It was a liquid, and that liquid, the colour of which could now be distinctly seen by the candlelight, was blood! While Léon paralysed with horror, watched these frightful streams, the young woman slept on peacefully, her regular breathing warming her lover's neck and shoulder.

* * * * *

The care which Léon had taken in ordering the dinner on their arrival at the inn of N—— adequately proved that he had a pretty level head, a high degree of intelligence and that he could look ahead. He did not in this emergency belie the character we have already indicated. He did not stir, and the whole strength of his mind was strained to keep this resolve in the presence of the frightful disaster which threatened him.

I can imagine that most of my readers, and, above all, my lady readers, filled with heroic sentiments, will blame the conduct of Léon on this occasion for remaining motionless. They will tell me he ought to have rushed to the Englishman's room and arrested the murderer, or, at least, to have pulled his bell and rung up the

people of the hotel. To this I reply that, in the first case, the bells in French inns are only room ornaments, and their cords do not correspond to any metallic apparatus. I would add respectfully, but decidedly, that, if it is wrong to leave an Englishman to die close by one, it is not praiseworthy to sacrifice for him a woman who is sleeping with her head on your shoulder. What would have happened if Léon had made an uproar and roused the hotel? The police, the inspector and his assistant would have come at once. These gentlemen are by profession so curious, that, before asking him what he had seen or heard, they would have questioned him as follows:—

"What is your name? Where are your papers? And what about Madam? What were you doing together in the Blue Chamber? You will have to appear at the Assizes to explain the exact month, at what hour in the night, you were witnesses of this deed."

Now it was precisely this thought of the inspector and officers of the law which first occurred to Léon's mind. Everywhere throughout life there are questions of conscience difficult to solve. Is it better to allow an unknown traveller to have his throat cut, or to disgrace and lose the woman one loves?

It is unpleasant to have to propose such a problem. I defy the cleverest person to solve it.

Léon did then what probably most would have done in his place. He never moved.

He remained fascinated for a long time with his eyes fixed upon the blue slipper and the little red stream which touched it. A cold sweat moistened his temples, and his heart beat in his breast as though it would burst.

A host of thoughts and strange and horrible fancies took possession of him, and an inward voice cried out all the time, "In an hour all will be known, and it is your own fault!" Nevertheless, by dint of repeating to himself "Qu'allais-je faire dans cette galère?" he finished up by perceiving some few rays of hope. "If we leave this accursed hotel," he said to himself at last, "before the discovery of what has happened in the adjoining room, perhaps they may lose trace of us. No one knows us here. I have only been seen in blue spectacles, and she has only been seen in a veil. We are only two steps from the station, and should be far away from it in an hour."

Then, as he had studied the time-table at great length to make out his journey, he recollected that a train for Paris stopped at eight o'clock. Very soon afterwards they would be

lost in the vastness of that town, where so many guilty persons are concealed. Who could discover two innocent people there? But would they not go into the Englishman's room before eight o'clock? That was the vital question.

Quite convinced that there was no other course before him, he made a desperate effort to shake off the torpor which had taken possession of him for so long, but at the first movement he made his young companion woke up and kissed him half-consciously. At the touch of his icy cheek she uttered a little cry.

"What is the matter?" she said to him anxiously. "Your forehead is as cold as marble."

"It is nothing," he replied in a voice which belied his words. "I heard a noise in the next room. . . ."

He freed himself from her arms, then he moved the blue slipper and put an armchair in front of the door of communication, so as to hide the horrid liquid from his lover's eyes. It had stopped flowing, and had now collected into quite a big pool on the floor. Then he half opened the door which led to the passage, and listened attentively. He even ventured to go up to the Englishman's door, which was closed. There were already stirrings in the hotel, for day

had begun. The stablemen were grooming the horses in the yard, and an officer came downstairs from the second story, clinking his spurs. He was on his way to preside at that interesting piece of work, more agreeable to horses than to men, which is technically known as *la botte.*

Léon re-entered the Blue Chamber, and, with every precaution that love could invent, with the help of much circumlocution and many euphemisms, he revealed their situation to his friend.

It was dangerous to stay and dangerous to leave too precipitately; still much more dangerous to wait at the hotel until the catastrophe in the next room was discovered.

There is no need to describe the terror caused by this communication, or the tears which followed it, the senseless suggestions which were advanced, or how many times the two unhappy young people flung themselves into each other's arms, saying, "Forgive me! forgive me!" Each took the blame. They vowed to die together, for the young woman did not doubt that the law would find them guilty of the murder of the Englishman, and as they were not sure that they would be allowed to embrace each other again on the scaffold they did it now to suffocation, and vied with each other in watering

themselves with tears. At length, after having talked much rubbish and exchanged many tender and harrowing words, they decided, in the midst of a thousand kisses, that the plan thought out by Léon, to leave by the eight o'clock train, was really the only one practicable, and the best to follow. But there were still two mortal hours to get through. At each step in the corridor they trembled in every limb. Each creak of boots proclaimed the arrival of the inspector.

Their small packing was done in a flash. The young woman wanted to burn the blue slipper in the fireplace; but Léon picked it up and, after wiping it by the bedside, he kissed it and put it in his pocket. He was astonished to find that it smelt of vanilla, though his lover's perfume was "Bouquet de l'impératrice Eugénie."

Everybody in the hotel was now awake. They heard the laughing of waiters, servant-girls singing at their work, and soldiers brushing their officers' clothes. Seven o'clock had just struck. Léon wanted to make his friend drink a cup of coffee, but she declared that her throat was so choked up that she should die if she tried to drink anything.

Léon, armed with the blue spectacles, went down to pay the bill. The host begged his

pardon for the noise that had been made; he could not at all understand it, for the officers were always so quiet! Léon assured him that he had heard nothing, but had slept profoundly.

"I don't think your neighbour on the other side would inconvenience you," continued the landlord; "he did not make much noise. I bet he is still sleeping soundly."

Léon leant hard against the desk to keep from falling, and the young woman, who had followed him closely, clutched at his arm and tightened the veil over her face.

"He is a swell," added the pitiless host. "He will have the best of everything. Ah! he is a good sort. But all the English are not like him. There was one here who is a skinflint. He thought everything too dear: his room, his dinner. He wanted me to take a five-pound Bank of England note in settlement of his bill for one hundred and eighty-five francs, . . . and to risk whether it was a good one! But stop, Monsieur; perhaps you will know, for I heard you talking English with Madam. . . . Is it a good one?"

With these words he showed Léon a five-pound bank-note. On one of its corners there was a little spot of red which Léon could readily explain to himself.

"I think it is quite good," he said in a stifled voice.

"Oh, you have plenty of time," replied the host; "the train is not due here till eight o'clock, and it is always late. Will you not sit down, Madam? You seem tired. . . ."

At this moment a fat servant-girl came up.

"Hot water, quick," she said, "for milord's tea. Give me a sponge too. He has broken a bottle of wine and the whole room is flooded."

At these words Léon fell into a chair, and his companion did the same. An intense desire to laugh overtook them both, and they had the greatest difficulty in restraining themselves. The young woman squeezed his hand joyfully.

"I think we will not go until the two o'clock train," said Léon to the landlord. "Let us have a good meal at midday."

Biarritz,
*September,* 1866.

# DJOÛMANE

## DJOÛMANE

ON the 21st of May, 18—, we returned to Tlemcen. The expedition had been a fortunate one: we brought back oxen, sheep, goats, prisoners and hostages.

After a thirty-seven days' campaign, or rather of incessant hunt, our horses were thin and lean-ribbed, but their eyes were still lively and full of fire; not one was saddle-galled. We men were bronzed by the sun, our hair was long, our cross-belts were dirty, and our waistcoats were worn to threads; we all presented that appearance of indifference to danger and hardship which characterises the true soldier.

What general would not have chosen our light cavalry for a battle-charge rather than the smartest of squadrons all decked out in new clothes?

Since morning I had thought of all the little pleasures that awaited me.

Now I should sleep in my iron bedstead, after having slept for thirty-seven nights on a square of oilcloth. I should sit on a chair to take my dinner, and should have as much soft bread and

salt as I liked. Next I wondered to myself whether Mademoiselle Coucha would wear a pomegranate flower or jessamine in her hair, and if she had kept the vows made when I left; but, faithful or inconstant, I knew she could reckon on the great depth of tenderness that a man brings home from the wilds. There was not anyone in our squadron who had not made plans for the evening.

The colonel received us in a most fatherly manner, and even told us he was satisfied with us; then he took our commanding officer aside and for five minutes, and in low tones, communicated to him some not very agreeable intelligence, so far as we could judge from their expressions.

We noticed the movements of the colonel's moustaches, which rose up to his eyebrows, whilst those of the commandant fell, piteously out of curl, almost on to his breast. A young trooper whom I pretended not to hear, maintained that the commandant's nose stretched as far as one could see; but very soon ours lengthened too, for the commandant came to tell us to " Go and feed your horses, and be ready to set off at sunset! The officers will dine with the colonel at five o'clock, in the open; the horses must be mounted after the coffee. . . . Is it possible that you are not pleased at this, gentlemen? . . ."

It did not suit us, and we saluted in silence, inwardly sending him to all the devils we could think of, and the colonel into the bargain.

We had very little time in which to make our small preparations. I hurried to change my dress, and, when I had done this, I was wise enough not to sit in my easy-chair, for fear I should fall asleep.

At five o'clock I went to the colonel's. He lived in a large Moorish house. I found the open court filled with French and natives, all crowding round a band of pilgrims or mountebanks who had come from the South.

An old man conducted the performance; he was as ugly as a monkey and half naked, under his burnous, which was full of holes. His skin was the colour of chocolate made of water; he was tattooed all over with scars; his hair was frizzy and so matted that from a distance one might have thought he had a bearskin cap on his head; and his beard was white and bristly.

He was reputed to be a great saint and a great wizard.

In front of him an orchestra, composed of two flutes and three tambourines, made an infernal din, worthy of the performance about to be played. He said that he had received com-

plete sway over demons and wild beasts from a famous Mahomedan priest, and, after some compliments addressed to the colonel and the élite audience, he went off into a sort of prayer or incantation, accompanied by his orchestra, whilst the actors danced to his command, turned on one foot, and struck their breasts heavy blows with their fists.

Meanwhile the tambourines and flutes increased their din and played faster and faster.

When exhaustion and giddiness had made these people lose what few brains they had, the chief sorcerer drew several scorpions and serpents from some baskets round him, and, after showing that they were full of life, he threw them to his jesters, who fell upon them like dogs on a bone, and tore them to pieces with their teeth, if you please!

We looked down on this extraordinary spectacle from a high gallery; no doubt the colonel treated us to it to give us a good appetite for our dinner. As for myself, I turned my eyes away from these beasts, who disgusted me, and amused myself by staring at a pretty girl of thirteen or fourteen years of age, who had threaded through the crowd to get nearer to the performance.

She had the most beautiful eyes imaginable,

and her hair fell on her shoulders in fine tresses; these ended in small pieces of silver, which made a tinkling sound as she moved her head gracefully about. She was dressed with more taste than most of the girls of that country; she had a kerchief of silk and gold on her head, a bodice of embroidered velvet, and short pantaloons of blue satin, showing her bare legs encircled with silver anklets. There was not a vestige of a veil over her face. Was she a Jewess or a heathen? or did she perhaps belong to those wandering tribes of unknown origin who never trouble themselves with religious prejudice?

Whilst I followed her every movement with so much interest she had arrived at the first row of the circle where the fanatics carried on their exercises.

While she was trying to get still nearer she knocked over a narrow-bottomed basket that had not been opened. Almost at the same time the sorcerer and the child both uttered a terrible cry, and there was a great commotion in the ring, everyone recoiling with horror.

A very big snake had escaped from the basket and the little girl had trodden on it. In an instant the reptile had curled itself round her leg and I saw several drops of blood ooze from under the ring that she wore round her ankle.

She fell down backwards, crying, and grinding her teeth, while her lips were covered with a white foam, and she rolled in the dust.

"Run! run, doctor!" I cried out to our surgeon-major; "for the love of Heaven save the poor child."

"Greenhorn!" the major replied, shrugging his shoulders. "Do you not see that it is part of the programme? Moreover, my trade is to cut off your arms and legs. It is the business of my *confrère* down below there to cure girls who are bitten by snakes."

In the meantime the old wizard had run up, and his first care was to possess himself of the snake.

"Djoûmane! Djoûmane!" he said to it in a tone of friendly reproach. The serpent uncoiled itself, quitted its prey, and started to crawl away. The sorcerer nimbly seized it by the end of its tail, and, holding it at arm's length, he went round the circle exhibiting the reptile, which bit and hissed without being able to stand erect.

You know that a snake held by his tail does not know in the least what to do with himself. He can only raise himself a quarter of his length, and can not therefore bite the hand of the person who seizes him.

The next minute the serpent was put back in his basket and the lid firmly tied down. The magician then turned his attention to the little girl, who shrieked and kicked about all the time. He put a pinch of white powder, which he drew from his girdle, on the wound, and whispered an incantation in the child's ear, with unexpected results. The convulsions ceased; the little girl wiped her mouth, picked up her silk handkerchief, shook the dust off it, put it on her head again, rose up, and soon after went away.

Shortly after she came up to our gallery to collect money, and we fastened on her forehead and shoulders many fifty-centime coins.

This ended the performance, and we sat down to dinner.

I was very hungry, and was preparing to do justice to a splendid Tartary eel, when our doctor, by whom I sat, said that he recognised the snake of the preceding moment. That made it quite impossible for me to touch a mouthful.

After first making great fun of my fastidiousness the doctor annexed my share of the eel, and declared that snake tasted delicious.

"Those brutes you saw just now," he said to me, "are connoisseurs. They live in caverns with their serpents as the Troglodytes do; their girls are pretty—witness the little girl in blue

knickerbockers. No one knows what their religion is, but they are a cunning lot, and I should like to make the acquaintance of their sheik."

We learnt during dinner why we were to recommence the campaign. Sidi-Lala, hotly pursued by Colonel R——, was trying to reach the mountains of Morocco.

There was choice of two routes: one to the south of Tlemcen, fording the Moulaïa, at the only place not rendered inaccessible by rocks; the other by the plain, to the north of our cantonment, where we should find our colonel and the bulk of the regiment.

Our squadron was ordered to stop him at the river crossing if he attempted it, but this was scarcely likely.

You know that the Maulaïa flows between two walls of rock, and there is but a single point, like a kind of very narrow breach, where horses can ford it. I knew the place well, and I did not understand why a blockhouse had not been raised there before. At all events, the colonel had every chance of encountering the enemy, and we of making a useless journey.

Before the conclusion of dinner several orderlies from Maghzen had brought despatches from Colonel R——. The enemy had made a stand, and seemed to want to fight. They had

lost time. Colonel R——'s infantry had come up and routed them.

But where had they escaped to? We knew nothing at all, and must decide which of the two routes to take. I have not mentioned the last resource that could be taken, viz. to drive them into the desert, where his herds and camp would very soon die of hunger and thirst. Signals were agreed upon to warn us of the enemy's movements.

Three cannon-shots from Tlemcen would tell us that Sidi-Lala was visible in the plain, and we should carry rockets with us in case we had to let them know that we needed reinforcements. In all probability the enemy could not show itself before daybreak, and our two columns had several hours' start. Night had fallen by the time we got to horse. I commanded the advance guard platoon. I felt tired and cold; I put on my cloak, turned up the collar, thrust my feet far into my stirrups, and rode quietly to my mare's long-striding walk, listening absently to Quartermaster Wagner's stories about his love affairs, which unluckily ended by the flight of an infidel, who had run off with not only his heart, but a silver watch and a pair of new boots. I had heard this history before, and it appeared even longer than usual.

The moon rose as we started on our way. The sky was clear, but a light, white mist had come up since sundown, and skimmed the ground, which looked as though it were covered with down. On this white background the moon threw long shadows, and everything took on a fantastic air. Very soon I thought I saw Arab mounted sentries. As I came nearer I found they were tamarisks in flower. Presently I stopped short, for I thought I heard the cannon-shot signal. Wagner told me it was the sound of a horse galloping.

We reached the fort and the commandant made his preparations.

The place was very easy to defend, and our squadron would have been sufficient to hold back a considerable force. Complete solitude reigned on the other side of the river.

After a pretty long wait, we heard the gallop of a horse, and soon an Arab came in sight mounted on a magnificent animal and riding towards us. By his straw hat crowned with ostrich plumes, and by his embroidered saddle from which hung a *gebira* ornamented with coral and chased with gold flowers, we recognised that he was a chief; our guide told us it was Sidi-Lala himself. He was a fine-looking and well-built young man, who managed his horse admirably.

He put it at a gallop, threw his long gun up in the air and caught it again, shouting at us unintelligible terms of defiance.

The days of chivalry are over, and Wagner called for a gun to *take the marabout down a peg,* as he called it; but I objected, yet, so that it should not be said that the French refused to fight at close quarters with an Arab, I asked the commandant for leave to go through the ford and cross swords with Sidi-Lala. Permission was granted me, and I was soon over the river where the enemy's chief was trotting a little way off, and taking stock of things.

Directly he saw I was across he ran upon me and aimed with his gun.

"Take care!" cried Wagner.

I am rarely afraid of a horseman's shot, and after the tricks he had just played with it I thought that Sidi-Lala's gun could not be in a condition to fire. And in fact he pulled the trigger when he was only three paces from me, but the gun missed fire, as I had expected. Soon he turned his horse round so rapidly that instead of planting my sabre in his breast I only caught his floating burnous.

But I pressed him close, keeping him always on my right and beating him back, whether he was willing or not, towards the steep declivities

which edged the river. He tried in vain to turn aside, but I pressed him closer and closer. After several moments of frantic effort, suddenly I saw his horse rear and the rider drew rein with both hands. Without stopping to ask myself why he made such a strange movement I was on him like a shot, and I pierced him with my blade, right in the centre of his back, my horse's hoof striking his left thigh at the same time. Man and horse disappeared, and my mare and I fell after them.

Without perceiving it we had reached the edge of a precipice and were hurled over it. . . . While I was yet in the air—so rapid is thought!—I remembered that the body of the Arab would break my fall. I could distinctly see under me a white burnous with a large red patch on it, and I should fall on it, head or tail.

It was not such a terrible leap as I feared, thanks to the water being high; I went in over head and ears and sputtered for an instant quite stunned, and I do not know quite how I found myself standing in the middle of the tall reeds at the river's edge.

I knew nothing of what had become of Sidi-Lala and the horses. I was dripping and shivering in the mud, between two walls of rock. I

took a few steps forward, hoping to find a place where the declivity was less steep; but the further I advanced the more abrupt and inaccessible it looked.

Suddenly I heard above my head the sound of horses' hoofs and the jangling of sabres against stirrups and spurs; it was evidently our squadron. I wanted to cry out, but not a sound would come out of my throat; I must in my fall have broken in my ribs.

Imagine the situation I was in. I heard the voices of our men and recognised them, and I could not call them to my aid.

"If he had let me do that," old Wagner was saying, "he would have lived to be made colonel."

The sound soon lessened and died away, and I heard it no more.

Above my head hung a great branch, and I hoped by seizing this to hoist myself up above the banks of the river. With a desperate effort I sprang up, and . . . crack! . . . the branch twisted and escaped from my hands with a frightful hissing. . . . It was an enormous snake. . . .

I fell into the water; the serpent glided between my legs and shot into the river, where it seemed to leave a trail of fire. . . .

A moment later I had regained my sang-froid, and the fire-light had not disappeared: it still trembled on the water. I saw it was the reflection from a torch. A score of steps from me a woman was filling a pitcher at the river with one hand, and in the other she held a lighted piece of resined wood. She had no idea I was there; she placed the pitcher coolly upon her head and, torch in hand, disappeared among the rushes. I followed her and found I was at the entrance to a cave.

The woman advanced very quietly and mounted a very steep incline; it was a sort of staircase cut out of the face of an immense hall. By torchlight I saw the threshold of this great hall, which did not quite reach the level of the river; but I could not judge of its full extent. Without quite knowing what I did, I entered the slope after the young woman who carried the torch, and followed her at a distance. Now and again her light disappeared behind some cavity of the rocks, but I soon found her again.

I thought I could make out, too, the gloomy openings of great galleries leading into the principal room. It looked like a subterranean town with streets and squares. I stopped short, deeming it dangerous to venture alone into that vast labyrinth.

Suddenly one of the galleries below me was lit up brilliantly, and I saw a great number of torches, which appeared to come out of the sides of the rocks as though they formed a great procession. At the same time a monotonous chanting rose up, which recalled the singing of the Arabs as they recited their prayers. Soon I could distinguish a vast multitude advancing slowly. At their head stepped a black man, almost naked, his head covered with an enormous mass of stubbly hair. His white beard fell on his breast, and contrasted with the brown colour of his chest, which was gashed with bluish-tinted tattooing. I quickly recognised the sorcerer of the previous evening, and, soon after, saw the little girl near him who had played the part of Eurydice, with her fine eyes, and her silk pantaloons, and the embroidered handkerchief on her head.

Women and children and men of all ages followed them, all holding torches, all dressed in strange costumes of vivid colour, with trailing skirts and high caps, some made of metal, which reflected the light from the torches on all sides.

The old sorcerer stopped exactly below me, and the whole procession with him. The silence was profound. I was twenty feet above him, protected by great stones, from behind which

I hoped to see everything without being perceived. At the feet of the old man I noticed a large slab of stone, almost round, with an iron ring in the centre.

He pronounced some words in a tongue unknown to me, which I felt sure was neither Arabic nor Kabylic. A rope and pulleys, hung from somewhere, fell at his feet; several of the assistants attached it to the ring, and at a given signal twenty stalwart arms all pulled at the stone simultaneously. It seemed of great weight, but they raised it and put it to one side.

I then saw what looked like the opening down a well, the water of which was at least a yard from the top. Water, did I say? I do not know what the frightful liquid was; it was covered over with an iridescent film, disturbed and broken in places, and showing a hideous black mud beneath.

The sorcerer stood in the midst of the gathered crowd, near the kerbstone which surrounded the well, his left hand on the little girl's head; with his right he made strange gestures, whilst uttering a kind of incantation.

From time to time he raised his voice as though he were calling someone. "Djoûmane! Djoûmane!" he cried; but no one came. None

the less he went on making raucous cries which did not seem to come from a human throat, and rolled his eyes and ground his teeth. The mummeries of this old rascal incensed and filled me with indignation; I felt tempted to hurl a stone at his head that I had ready to hand. When he had yelled the name of Djoûmane for the thirtieth time or more, I saw the iridescent film over the well shake, and at this sign the whole crowd flung itself back; the old man and the little girl alone remained by the side of the hole.

Suddenly there was a great bubbling of the bluish mud from the well, and out of this mud came the head of an enormous snake, of livid grey colour, with phosphorescent eyes. . . .

Involuntarily I leapt backwards. I heard a little cry and the sound of some heavy body falling into the water. . . .

When perhaps a tenth of a second later I again looked below I saw the sorcerer stood alone by the well-side; the water was still bubbling, and in the middle of what remained of the iridescent scum there floated the kerchief which had covered the little girl's hair. . . .

Already the stone was being moved, and it glided into its place over the aperture of the horrible gulf. Then all the torches were simul-

taneously extinguished, and I remained in darkness in the midst of such a profound silence that I could distinctly hear my own heart beat. . . .

When I had recovered a little from this ghastly scene I wanted to quit the cavern, vowing that if I succeeded in rejoining my comrades, I would return to exterminate the abominable denizens of those quarters, men and serpents.

But the pressing question was how to find my way out. I had come, I believed, a hundred feet into the cave, keeping the rock wall on my right.

I turned half round, but saw no light which might indicate the entrance to the cavern; furthermore, it did not extend in a straight line, and, besides, I had climbed up all the time from the river's edge. I groped along the rock with my left hand, and sounded the ground with the sword which I held in my right, advancing slowly and cautiously. For a quarter of an hour or twenty minutes . . . possibly for half an hour, I walked without being able to find the way I came in.

I was seized with apprehension. Had I entered unconsciously some side gallery instead of returning the way I had at first taken? . . .

I went on all the time groping along the rock, when in place of the cold stone I felt a curtain, which yielded to my touch and let out a ray of light. Redoubling my precaution, I drew the curtain noiselessly aside and found myself in a little passage which led to a well-lighted room. The door was open, and I saw that the room was hung with silk tapestry, embroidered with flowers and gold. I noticed a Turkey carpet and the end of a velvet-covered divan. On the carpet was a narghile of silver and several perfume-burners. In short, it was an apartment sumptuously furnished in Arabian taste.

I approached with stealthy tread till I reached the door; a young woman squatted on the divan, and near her was a little low table of inlaid wood, which held a large silver-gilt tray full of cups and flagons and bouquets of flowers.

On entering this subterranean boudoir I felt quite intoxicated by the most exquisite perfume.

Everything in this retreat breathed voluptuousness; on every side I saw the glitter of gold and sumptuous materials, and varied colourings and rare flowers. The young woman did not notice me at first; she held her head down and fingered the yellow amber beads of a long necklace, absorbed in meditation. She was divinely

beautiful. Her features were like those of the unfortunate child I had seen below, but more finely formed, more regular and more voluptuous. She was as black as a raven's wing, and her hair was

"Long as are the robes of a king."

It fell over her shoulders to the divan and almost to the carpet under her feet. A gown of transparent silk in broad stripes showed her splendid arms and neck. A bodice of velvet braided with gold enclosed her figure, and her short blue satin knickerbockers revealed a marvellously tiny foot, from which hung a gold-worked Turkish slipper which she danced up and down gracefully and whimsically.

My boots creaked, and she raised her head and saw me.

Without being disturbed or showing the least surprise at seeing a stranger with a sword in his hand in her room, she clapped her hands gleefully and beckoned me to come nearer. I saluted her by placing my hand first on my heart and then on my head to show her I was acquainted with Mahomedan etiquette. She smiled, and with both hands she put aside her hair which covered the divan—this was to tell me to take a seat by her side. I thought all

the spices of Araby pervaded those beautiful locks.

I modestly seated myself at the extreme end of the divan, inwardly vowing I would very soon go much nearer to her. She took a cup from the tray, and holding it by the filigree handle she poured out some frothed coffee, and after touching it lightly with her lips she offered it to me.

"Ah, Roumi! Roumi! . . ." she said. "Shall we not kill the vermin, lieutenant? . . ."

At these words I opened my eyes as wide as a carriage entrance. This young lady had enormous moustaches, and was the living image of Quartermaster Wagner. . . . And it was indeed Wagner who stood over me with a cup of coffee, whilst, pillowed on my horse's neck, I stared at him wildly.

"It appears we have *pioncé,* all the same, lieutenant. We are at the ford, and the coffee is boiling."

# THE SPANISH WITCHES

## *Les Sorcières Espagnoles*

## THE SPANISH WITCHES

ANTIQUITIES, and especially Roman antiquities, have never appealed to me. I do not know how I ever consented to go to Murviedro to see what is left of Sagonta. I suffered great fatigue, had to eat abominable meals and after all I saw nothing. When travelling, one is forever worried by the thought that one may not be able to answer "yes," to the inevitable: "You have seen, no doubt . . . .?" which awaits every traveller on his return. Why should I have to see what others have seen before me? I, for my part, travel without aim—I am not an antiquarian and I have outgrown sentimental notions. I am not very sure that I remember the old cypress of the Zegris * in the Généraliffe † with as much pleasure as I do the pomegranates and the delicious seedless grapes I ate under the shadow of that venerable tree.

The excursion to Murviedro, however, proved

* Moorish tribe.

† A garden near the Alhambra.

very pleasant. I hired a horse and a native of Valencia to accompany me on foot. This man was a great talker and though something of a cheat turned out to be, on the whole, rather an amusing companion. He used no end of eloquence and diplomacy to get one real more from me than the price agreed upon for the stabling of the horse; but on the other hand he seemed so anxious I should not be cheated at any of the hostelries on the way, that to hear him argue the matter, one would think he was paying it out of his own pocket. The bill he presented every morning contained a long list of items for mending straps, for horse-shoeing, for wine to rub the horse down with, which wine he drank, no doubt; and with all these charges, I never in my life paid so little. He had a way of making me buy such a lot of trash wherever we passed, especially knives. He would then show me how to put the thumb on the blade in order to cut up your man without getting hurt. After a while, I always found that these knives were very heavy to carry. They knocked against each other in my pocket, striking my legs at every movement, and finally there seemed no other way to get rid of them, than by giving them to Vincent. He would always say:

"How your Excellency's friends will enjoy

all the beautiful things your Excellency is bringing back from Spain!"

I will never forget a bag of nuts which *my Excellency* bought to bring back to his friends, which were entirely eaten, with the help of my faithful guide, long before we ever reached Murviedro.

Although Vincent had seen a good deal of the world—he had sold orgeat in the streets of Madrid—still he had a goodly share of the superstition of his compatriots. He was a very pious man and during the days we spent together I had occasion to see what a peculiar religion his was. God did not trouble him much, he spoke of Him in an indifferent manner. But the saints, and especially the Blessed Virgin, commanded all his homage. It reminded me of people begging for positions, who believe that it is better to have friends in the anteroom to plead for them, than to reach the minister himself.

To understand his devotedness to the Blessed Virgin, one must know that in Spain there are Virgins and Virgins. Each town has its own, and ignores that of its neighbour. Our Lady of Peniscola, a small town where Vincent was born, was, according to him, more to be honoured than all the others put together.

"But," I said to him one day, "there are then several Blessed Virgins?"

"Of course; each province has its own."

"And in Heaven, how many are there?"

This question seemed to puzzle him for a moment; but his catechism coming to his aid, he answered with the hesitancy of a man who repeats a phrase without understanding its meaning:

"There is only one."

"Well then," I continued, "if you broke a leg, to which one would you pray? to the one in Heaven or to one on earth?"

"To Our Blessed Lady of Peniscola, of course."

"But why not to Our Lady of the Pillar at Saragossa, who performs so many miracles?"

"Pshaw! she is good for the people of Arragon."

In order to appeal to his weak point, his provincial patriotism, I said:

"If Our Lady of Peniscola is more powerful than that of Saragossa, it goes to prove that the Valencians are greater rogues than the natives of Arragon, since they must need such a powerful advocate to plead their cause before God."

"Oh! sir, the natives of Arragon are not

any better than we are; only we Valencians know the power of Our Lady of Peniscola and we trust in it implicitly."

"Tell me, Vincent: Do you not think that Our Lady of Peniscola speaks your Valencian dialect to God, when she pleads with Him not to send you to eternal perdition for your sins?"

"Oh! no, sir," replied Vincent promptly. "Your Excellency knows very well what language Our Lady speaks."

"No, truly I do not."

"Why, Latin, of course."

In the low mountains of the province of Valencia, one often comes across the remains of old castles. I asked Vincent one day when passing one of these, were there any ghosts to be seen. He smiled and said there were none in his country, but he added, winking an eye like a man who knows you are joking:

"Your Excellency has no doubt seen some in his own country?"

There is no word in the Spanish language which translates the exact meaning of ghost. *Duende,* which we find in the dictionary, expresses what we call an imp and is used in connection with boyish tricks. *Duendecito* (small *duende*) might he said of a boy who hides behind the curtains in a girl's room to frighten

her. But as to those tall spectres draped in white, they are not to be seen in Spain and no one ever hears of them. However, there are still bewitched Moors, near Grenada of whom tales are told, but they are, as a rule, well behaved spirits who appear in broad daylight to ask for baptism which was denied them when living. If you grant their wish, they usually tell you where to find a hidden treasure. They have also a kind of hairy wolf, called *el velludo,* a painting of which can be seen in the Alhambra, and also a headless horse which, notwithstanding this, gallops very rapidly over the stones which fill the ravines between the Alhambra and the Généraliffe. This is almost a complete list of all the ghosts with which children are either frightened or amused.

Happily, they still believe in witches.

About three miles from Murviedro there is a small inn, which stands by itself. I was dying of thirst and I stopped to ask for a drink. A very pretty girl, not too dark-skinned, brought me one in a large jug of that porous earthenware which cools the water. Vincent who never passed an inn without feeling thirsty or giving me some other very good reason for going in, seemed reluctant to stop here. It was getting late, he said, we had a long way to go

and about a mile from there we would find a much better inn where we could get the most famous wine of Spain, except that of Peniscola. But I would not give in. I drank the water which was brought me. I ate the gazpacho (a Spanish food) cooked by the hands of the fair Carmencita whose profile I drew in my sketch-book.

During all this time, Vincent was rubbing down the horse whistling in an impatient manner and evidently was very reluctant to cross the threshold of this house.

Finally we resumed our journey. I spoke of Carmencita several times, but Vincent only shook his head:

"An evil house! An evil house!"

"Evil? but why? The gazpacho was very good."

"That is not to be wondered at—the devil himself no doubt prepared it."

"The devil! do you say that because she does not stint the pepper, or has that nice woman the devil for a cook?"

"Who knows?"

"Oh! so you think she is a witch?"

Vincent looked about anxiously to see if there was anyone in sight. Whipping up the horse and running alongside of me, he nodded

his head affirmatively, thereby admitting the truth, without, however, giving me a precise answer. I felt very curious to know more and was delighted to find that my guide was a believer in witches.

"And so, she is a witch?" I said, walking my horse once more. "And the daughter, what is she?"

"Your Excellency knows the proverb: *Primera p . . . ; luego alcahucta, pues bruja* (At first p . . . then a go-between and finally a witch.) The daughter is only beginning, the mother has reached the end."

"How do you know she is a witch? What has she done to prove it?"

"What they all do. She has the *evil eye* * which causes emaciation in children; olive trees wither under her gaze, mules die, and she is responsible for a great many other disasters."

"But do you know anyone who has suffered from her witchcraft?"

"Do I? Why, my own first cousin, for instance, on whom she played a very clever trick."

"Do tell me about it."

"My cousin does not like anyone to speak

* *The evil eye* is not a disease of the eye, it is the harm done by the fascination of the eyes. In the province of Valencia, small scarlet bracelets are tied to the wrists of children, to protect them from the evil eye.

of it. But he is in Cadiz just now, and I hope no harm will come to him should I tell you."

I settled his doubts on the subject by offering him a good cigar. He considered that an irresistible argument and began in this way.

"First you must know, sir, that my cousin's name is Henriquez and that he is a native of Grao in Valencia; he is a sailor and fisherman by trade, an honest man, a good father and also a devout believer, like all of his race; for of that we may boast, poor as we all are. My cousin was a fisherman in a small hamlet near Peniscola, for though a native of Grao, his family lived in Peniscola. He was born in his father's fishing-smack which accounts for his being such a good sailor. He had been to India, to Portugal, in fact everywhere. When not on a big ship, he would take his own boat and go fishing. On his return he always moored it to a stout stake and then went home and slept soundly. Well, it happened that one morning when starting out as usual, what should he see? . . . Instead of the knot he had made, such a knot as only a good sailor can make, there was the boat tied like an old woman ties her donkey to a tree.

"'Some boys were out in my boat last night,' he thought; 'if I catch them, I will thrash them well.'

"He spent the day fishing and returned at night. He fastened his boat, as usual, and, to make sure this time, he made a double knot. Next morning there was the knot undone. My cousin was beside himself with rage and he began to guess at the truth of the matter. However, he took a new rope and once more tied the boat securely to its moorings. Next morning the new rope was gone and in its place was an old piece of rotten cable. Moreover, his sail was torn, proving conclusively that it had been unfurled during the night. My cousin said to himself:

"'This is not the work of any of the boys; they would not dare use the sail for fear of upsetting. It is a thief, no doubt.'

"What did he do but stow himself away in his boat one night, in the space where he always kept his bread and rice when he sailed away for several days at a time. He threw an old coat over himself and lay there very quietly. At midnight—mind the hour—he suddenly heard voices as if a number of people were running toward the beach. He peeped from under his coat and saw . . . not thieves, Heavens, but a dozen old women, barefooted and with their hair flying in disorder. My cousin is a bold man and he had a sharp knife in his hand

to use against thieves; but when he saw he had to deal with witches, his courage gave way. He covered his head with his coat and prayed to Our Lady of Peniscola to keep these creatures from seeing him.

"He lay all in a heap in the bow of the boat wondering what he should do, when the witches, loosening the cord and unfurling the sail, set out to sea. If the boat had been a horse, one could have said of it that it had taken the bit between its teeth. It just seemed to fly over the water. It went along with such rapidity that the swishing of the water was deafening and even the tar melted.* And there is nothing to wonder at in this, for these witches have a strong wind at their command, when you think how the devil blows it for them. Meanwhile, my cousin could hear them talking and laughing and frisking about in the boat, boasting of the evil things they had done. All the women seemed to know each other, though there were some who must have come from very far, for they were strangers to my cousin. The Ferrer woman, that old witch at whose house you

* I did not dare interrupt my guide to seek an explanation of this phenomenon. Could it be that the rapidity of the boat's movement produced enough heat to melt the tar? It can be seen that my friend Vincent, who had never been at sea, did not use the *local colour* very cleverly.

stopped so long, was at the tiller. At last, after a long time, the boat stopped, and, after beaching it, the witches jumped out and tied it to a large stone. When their voices died away, my cousin Henriquez ventured to look out. The night was not very dark and he could see that a few feet from the bank were some reeds bending with the wind and beyond that a big fire. Rest assured that the witches were holding revelry there. Henriquez had the courage to jump out of the boat and cut some of the reeds which he quickly hid in the boat with him. After waiting quietly, for an hour or so, he heard them coming back. They pushed the boat out and sailed with the same incredible rapidity.

"'At the rate we are going,' thought my cousin, 'we will soon be in Peniscola.'

"Suddenly one of the witches called out:

"'Sisters, I hear three o'clock striking.'

"She had no sooner said this than each and every one of them disappeared. You know that they can only be abroad at night between twelve and three.

"The boat stopped and my cousin was obliged to row. God knows how long he was out at sea, before he managed to reach Peniscola. More than two days perhaps! He finally arrived thoroughly worn out. As soon as he

had had a glass of brandy and something to eat, he went to the druggist of Peniscola, a learned man who knows all about medicinal plants, and showed him the reeds.

"Where does this come from?" he asked of the apothecary.

"'From America,' answered the man. 'They are sugar-canes and only to be found in America. Were you to try and sow the seeds here, they would never grow.'

"My cousin, without another word to the apothecary, went straight to the Ferrer woman.

"'Paca,' says he on entering, 'you are a witch.'

"She cried out:

"'Lord, Lord!'

"'I know that you are a witch, for you go to America and return in a night. I went with you last night and I can prove it. Here are sugar-canes I gathered over there.'"

And with that Vincent, who had recited all this in an excited manner, held out his hand to me with a very convincing gesture and handed me a few blades of grass he had just pulled up. I could not help a look of surprise, thinking for the moment that these were the sugar-canes of America.

Vincent continued:

"The witch said:

"'Don't you breathe a word of this; here is a bag of rice, take it away and leave me alone.'

"Henriquez said:

"'No, I will not leave you alone, until you give me a charm by which I can raise a wind such as took us to America.'

"Then the witch gave him a written charm in a gourd, which he always takes with him when he goes out to sea. If I had been in his place I would have thrown the whole thing in the fire, charm and all, or else I would have given it to a priest, for whoever deals with the devil will find him a rogue of a merchant."

I thanked Vincent for his story and to pay him back in his own coin, I told him that in my country, witches did not need boats in which to get about, that their usual way of travelling was on a broomstick which they rode astride.

"Your Excellency knows perfectly well that that is not possible," answered Vincent very coolly.

I was amazed at his incredulity. It certainly was not fair to me, who never raised a doubt as to the truth of the story of the sugar-canes. I expressed great indignation at his unbelief and told him in no gentle words that he had better

not attempt to discuss things of which he knew nothing, adding also that if we were in France, I could bring forward as many witnesses as he could possibly wish.

"If your Excellency has seen this, then it must be true," answered Vincent, "but if you have not seen it with your own eyes I will always maintain that it is not possible for a witch to ride a broom astride. Because in a broom some of the straws must necessarily overlap each other, in that way forming a cross, and how could witches use anything in the shape of a cross?"

He evidently thought this an unanswerable argument, and I got out of it by saying that, of course, there were brooms and brooms. That a witch could ride a birch broom, that he would not admit, but one whose straws were straight and stiff like a broom of furze, that might be possible.

"I have always heard it said, sir," said Vincent, "that there are a great many sorcerers in your country."

"That comes, my good man, of not having any inquisition in France."

"Then your Excellency must, no doubt, have seen a good many of these people who sell charms for all sorts of things. I, with my own eyes, have seen the results of such spells."

"Just imagine that I don't know about these things, and tell me what you saw—I will tell you after if it is true."

"Well, sir, I was told that there are people in your country who sell charms for a good round sum of money. They give you a reed with a knot at one end and a cork at the other. Inside the reed are small animals through which you get all you ask. But you know as well as I do how they feed these animals . . . with the flesh of a child who has not been baptized, and when the owner of the reed can not get any, he must cut a piece of his own flesh . . . (Vincent's hair stood on end in terror) and you must feed them every twenty-four hours, yes sir."

"Have you any of these reeds you speak of?"

"To be truthful sir, I have not, but I know a man called Romero who had one; I knew him intimately, I have had more drinks with him than with anyone else (of course before I knew what he was as I know now). This Romero was a zagal * by trade. He was very ill, at one time, after which he *lost his wind,* so that he

* A *zagal* is a sort of postillion on foot. He holds the reins of the two front mules of a team and guides them when they ride at a gallop. If he stops, the carriage drives over him. In the new coaches they call the man who puts in the baggage a *zagal* also, but this is not correct, for he is really the *tiger* of an English carriage.

was no good at running. He was advised to go on a pilgrimage to be cured but he would say:

"'While I am away on a pilgrimage, who will feed my children?'

"So worried was he that he did not know what to do and one day he found his way to some witch who sold him one of these reeds I have just mentioned to your Excellency. Well, sir, would you believe it, since then he can beat a hare at running. There never was a zagal to compare to him. You know what a dangerous and fatiguing trade it is, well, to-day he can run with the mules without losing a puff of his cigar. He can run from Valencia to Murcia without stopping to draw breath. But anyone has only to look at him to realise the cost of this. He is nothing but skin and bone and if his eyes continue to sink in, very soon he will be able to see out of the back of his head; these little animals I told you of are gnawing away at his flesh.

"There are charms for other things besides running. . . . Some of them protect you from lead and steel, make you *tough* as one might say. Napoleon had one and that is why they could not kill him in Spain; but still there might have been a way. . . ."

"Which is to cast a bullet in silver," I interrupted, remembering the bullet with which a brave Whig pierced Claverhouse's shoulder-blade.

"A silver one might do," continued Vincent, "if it was cast with pieces of silver on which was a cross, such as you find on old coins, but, what is still better, is to simply take a wax taper which has burned on the altar during mass. You melt this wax in a bullet mould and rest assured that neither charm nor witchcraft, nor even a coat of mail, can protect anyone against such a bullet; Juan Cole, who terrorised the neighbourhood of Tortosa once upon a time, was killed by just such a bullet fired by a brave Spanish soldier. When he was dead and the soldier searched him, he found that his breast was covered with marks of lead bullets and that, too, when he had charms hung about his neck, and all sorts of gewgaws on the same order. José Maria, who is so much talked of in Andalusia, has a charm against bullets, but let him beware if anyone hits him with a wax bullet! You have heard how he ill-treats the priests and monks who fall in his hands; that is because he knows that they bless the wax which will kill him some day."

No doubt Vincent would have told me much more had not the Castle of Murviedro loomed up before us, which naturally changed the current of our thoughts.

VALENCIA, *November,* 1830.

# THE PISTOL SHOT

## *Le Coup de Pistolet*

From the Russian of Pushkin

# THE PISTOL SHOT

## I

"We fired at each other."—BARIATYNSKI.

"I vowed to kill him, according to the code of duelling, and I still have my shot to fire.—*One night when on guard.*

WE were in camp in the village of ——. Everyone knows the life of an officer of the line: in the morning drill and horseback exercise; then comes dinner with the colonel of the regiment, or else at the Jewish restaurant; and at night drinks and cards. At ——, there were no entertainments of any kind, for no one had a marriageable daughter to bring out. We spent our time in each other's quarters, and at our evening gatherings there were uniforms only.

However, there was one man in our set who was not a soldier. He must have been about thirty-five and consequently we looked upon him as quite old. His experience had great weight with us, and besides his reserve, his grand air and sarcastic manner made a deep impression

on us young men. There seemed to be something mysterious about his life. He looked like a Russian, though he bore a foreign name. In days gone by he had been in a regiment of Hussars where he was quite prominent at one time; but suddenly he had sent in his resignation, no one knew why, and had retired to this poor out-of-the-way village, where he fared very badly, while at the same time spending much money. He always wore a shabby overcoat and still he kept open house where every officer was made welcome. To tell the truth, his dinners generally consisted of two or three simple dishes prepared by his servant, an old discharged soldier, but the champagne always flowed. No one knew anything of his circumstances or his means, and no one dared ask him any questions on the subject. There were plenty of books in his house—mostly military—and a few novels. He lent them willingly and never asked for them again; on the other hand, he never returned those he borrowed. His one pastime was pistol shooting. The walls of his room were riddled with bullets, giving it the appearance of a honeycomb. A rich collection of pistols was the only luxury to be seen in the miserable house he occupied. The accuracy of his aim was remarkable, and if he had taken a bet that

he could shoot the pompon on a helmet, not one of us would have hesitated to put the helmet on. Sometimes we talked of duelling, but Silvio (I will give him that name) never opened his lips on the subject. If someone asked him had he ever fought a duel, he answered shortly that he had, and that was all; he never entered into any particulars and it was evident that he disliked being asked such questions. We surmised that the death of one of his victims had left a blight on his life. Never for a minute would any of us have thought that he could have been guilty of faint-heartedness. There are some people whose very appearance precludes such an idea.

One day eight or ten of our officers were dining at Silvio's. We drank as much as usual, that is, excessively. When dinner was over, we begged of our host to take the bank in a game of faro. After refusing to do so, for he seldom played, he finally called for cards and laying fifty ducats on the table before him, he sat down and shuffled. We formed in a circle about him and the game began. When playing Silvio never uttered a word, neither objecting nor explaining. If a player made a mistake, he paid out exactly the amount due him or else credited it to himself. We were all familiar with his

manner of playing and always let him have his own way. But on the day I speak of, there was with us an officer newly arrived who, through absent-mindedness, doubled his stakes on a certain card. Silvio took the chalk and marked down what was due him. The officer, convinced that there was a mistake, made some objections. Silvio, still mute, went on dealing as if he had not heard. The officer, out of patience by this time, took the brush and wiped off the figures. Silvio picked up the chalk and wrote them down again. At this, the officer, excited by the wine, by the play and the laughter of his comrades, and thinking he had been insulted, took up a brass candlestick and hurled it at Silvio, who by bending aside, averted the blow. Great was the uproar! Silvio rose, pale with rage, and with eyes blazing:

"My dear sir," he said, "you will please leave this room, and be thankful that this has happened in my house."

Not one of us doubted the outcome of this fray, and we all looked upon our new comrade as a dead man. The officer went out saying he was ready to meet the banker just as soon as it was convenient. The game proceeded a few minutes longer, but it was evident that the master of the house was not paying much attention

to what was going on; we all left, one by one, and returned to our quarters discussing the while the vacancy in our ranks which was sure to take place.

Next morning, while at riding exercise, we all wondered if the poor lieutenant were dead or alive, when, to our surprise, he appeared among us. We plied him with questions and he answered that he had had no challenge from Silvio, which caused us all much surprise. We called on Silvio and found him in his yard, firing bullet after bullet at an ace nailed to the door. He received us in his usual manner, never mentioning the scene of the night before. Three days went by and the lieutenant was still alive. We kept saying to each other: "Will Silvio not fight?" amazed at such a thing. But Silvio did not fight. He simply gave a very lame explanation and that was all that was said.

This forbearance on his part did him much harm among us young men. A want of courage is never quite forgiven by youth, for to him fearlessness is the greatest quality one can possess and it excuses many faults. Still, after a while, all this was forgotten and by degrees, Silvio regained his old ascendency over us.

I, alone, could never feel the same toward him. Being of a romantic turn of mind, I had

loved this man, whose life was an enigma to us all, more than anyone else, and I had made him, in my thoughts, the hero of some mysterious drama. And he liked me, of this I felt sure, for when we were alone, dropping his sharp and sarcastic speeches, he would converse on all sorts of subjects, and unbend to me in a fascinating manner. Ever since that unlucky evening I speak of, the fact that he had been insulted and had not wiped out the offence in blood, worried me to such an extent that I never could feel at ease with him as in the days gone by. I even avoided looking at him and Silvio was too clever and quick not to notice and guess at the reason. He seemed to me to feel it deeply. On two occasions, I thought I detected a wish on his part to explain matters but I avoided him and he did not follow me. After that I never saw him except when others were present and we never again resumed our intimate talks.

Those happy mortals, who live in cities where there is so much to see and do, can never imagine how important certain small happenings can become in an out-of-the-way village or town. One of these is the arrival of the mail. Tuesdays and Fridays, the offices of our regiment were besieged with men. One expected money, another a letter, and again others looked for newspapers.

As a rule, everything was opened and read on the spot; news was given and the improvised post-office was full of animation. Silvio's letters were addressed care of our regiment and he called for them with us. One day a letter was handed to him, the seal of which he broke hurriedly. While reading it his eyes flashed with suppressed excitement. None of the officers but myself noticed this, as they were all busy reading their own letters.

"Gentlemen," said Silvio, "business compels me to leave town immediately. I must go to-night. I hope none of you will refuse to dine with me for the last time. I will expect you," said he, turning to me pointedly. "I hope you will not disappoint me."

After saying which he went away in great haste, and we all retired to our own quarters, agreeing to meet at his house later.

I arrived at Silvio's at the hour he had named and found almost the whole regiment there. Everything he possessed was packed and the bare walls riddled with bullets stared back at us. We sat down to dinner and our host was in such a jovial mood that before long we were all in the greatest of spirits. Corks flew about; the froth rose in our glasses which we refilled as rapidly as they emptied. We all felt great affec-

tion for our host and wished him a pleasant journey with joy and prosperity at the end of it. It was very late when we got up from the table and while we were all picking out our caps in the hall, Silvio took me by the hand and detained me as I was about to leave.

"I must speak to you," he said in a low tone.

So I remained after the others went away and, seated facing each other, we smoked our pipes in silence for a while. Silvio seemed worried and there was no trace of the feverish gaiety he had displayed in the earlier part of the evening. This dreadful pallor, the brilliancy of his eyes and the long puffs of smoke he blew from his mouth gave him the appearance of a fiend. After a few minutes he broke the silence.

"It maybe," he said, "that we will never see each other again; before we part, I wish to explain certain things to you. You have noticed, perhaps, that I attach very little importance to the average man's opinion, but I like you and I feel I can not leave without seeing you think better of me than you do."

He stopped to shake the ashes out of his pipe. I remained silent and avoided looking at him.

"It may have seemed strange to you," he continued, "that I did not ask any satisfaction from that drunkard, that young fool R——. You will admit that, having the choice of weapons, he was at my mercy and that there was not much chance of his killing me. I might call it generosity on my part but I will not lie about it. If I could have given R—— a good lesson, without in any way risking my life, he would not have been rid of me so easily.

I looked at Silvio in the greatest surprise. Such an admission from him was astounding. He went on:

"As it is, unhappily, I have no right to risk my life. Six years ago, I received a blow and the man who struck me is still alive."

This excited my curiosity to an unusual degree.

"You did not meet him?" I asked. "Surely some extraordinary circumstance must have prevented your doing so?"

"I did meet him," answered Silvio, "and here you see the result of our encounter."

He rose and drew from a box near him a cap of red cloth with a gilt braid and tassel, such as Frenchmen call *bonnet de police*.* He put

* A *bonnet de police* is a small cloth cap worn with undress uniform.

it on his head and I saw that a bullet had pierced it about an inch above the forehead.

"You know," said Silvio, "that I was in the Hussars of ——, and you also know what kind of a disposition I have, I like to rule everyone. Well, in my youth, it was positively a passion with me. In my day, brawlers were in fashion and I was the foremost brawler of the regiment. To get drunk was then considered a thing to be proud of; I could outdrink the famous B——, celebrated in song by D. D——. Every day brought its duel, and every day saw me either the principal actor in them or else taking the part of a second. My comrades looked up to me, and our superior officers, who were constantly being transferred, considered me a plague of which they could not be rid.

"As for me, I kept on quietly (or rather riotously) in my glorious career, when one day there was transferred to our regiment a young fellow who was very wealthy and of good family. I will not name him to you, but never have I met a fellow with such unheard of luck. Imagine having youth, a fine figure, no end of spirits, a daring which was utterly indifferent to danger, a great name, and unlimited means to do with as he liked, and you may have a faint

idea of the impression he created among us. My power was gone in an instant. At first, dazzled by my reputation, he tried to make friends with me, but I received his advances very coldly, seeing which, he quietly dropped me without showing any annoyance whatever. I took such a dislike to him, when I saw his popularity in the regiment and his success with the ladies, that I was driven almost to despair. I tried to pick a quarrel with him, but to my sarcastic remarks he answered with caustic and unexpected wit that had the merit besides of being more cheerful than mine. He was always in jest, while I was in dead earnest. Finally one night, while at a ball in a Polish house, seeing how much the ladies admired him, especially our hostess with whom I had been very friendly, I whispered in his ear some insulting remark which I have long since forgotten. He turned around and struck me. We grasped our swords, some of the ladies fainted and a few officers parted us. We went out immediately to fight it out right then and there.

" The three witnesses and myself reached the meeting-place and I awaited the coming of my adversary with no ordinary impatience. The sun rose, and its intense heat was being felt more and more every minute when I finally saw him

coming in the distance. He was on foot and in his shirt sleeves, carrying his uniform over his arm—he was attended by only one witness. I went forward to meet him and I noticed that his cap, which he carried in his hand, was full of cherries. Our witnesses placed us twelve paces from each other. It was my privilege to shoot first, but what with passion and hatred blinding me I feared my aim would be poor, and to gain time to steady my hand, I offered to let him fire first. He refused to do so, and it was then agreed we would leave it to chance. Luck was, as usual, with this spoilt child of fortune. He fired and pierced my cap. It was now my turn, and I felt he was at my mercy. I looked at him with eagerness, hoping to find him at least a little uneasy. Not at all, for there he stood, within range of my pistol, coolly picking the ripest cherries out of his cap and blowing the pits in my direction where they fell at my feet.

"'What will I gain,' thought I, 'by taking his life, when he thinks so little of it?'

"A diabolical thought crossed my mind. I unloaded a pistol.

"'It seems,' I said, 'that you care very little whether you die or not at the present moment. You seem more anxious to breakfast instead.

It will be as you please. I have no wish to disturb you.'

"'You will be kind enough to attend to your own business,' answered he, 'and to please fire, . . . but after all you may do as you like. You can always fire your shot when and where you like. I will always be at your call.'

"I went away with my witnesses to whom I said that I did not care to shoot just then and the thing ended there.

"I sent in my resignation and retired to this out-of-the-way village. From that day to this, I have thought of nothing but revenge. And now, the time has come! . . ."

Silvio drew from his pocket the letter received that morning. Someone, his lawyer it seemed, had written from Moscow that the *person in question* was soon to be married to a young and pretty girl.

"You can guess, I have no doubt," said Silvio, "who is *the person in question.* I am leaving for Moscow and we will see if he will look at death in the midst of bridal festivities with as much coolness as he did when facing it with a pound of cherries in his cap!"

After saying these words he rose and, throwing his cap viciously on the floor, he walked back and forth the length of the room like a

caged tiger. I had listened to him without saying a word, stirred by very contradictory feelings.

A servant entered saying the carriage was at the door. Silvio grasped my hand which he shook with all his might. He entered a small open carriage where were two boxes already, one containing his pistols and the other his luggage. We said good-bye once more and he was driven away.

## II

Years went by, when family matters compelled me to live in an obscure village in the district of ——. While looking after my interests, I often sighed for the enjoyable life I had led until then. The long solitary evenings of winter and spring were the hardest to bear. I could not become reconciled to their lonesomeness. Until the dinner hour I managed somehow to kill time by chatting with the starosty (Polish landowner), visiting my workmen and watching the new buildings being erected. But as soon as night came I was at a loss to know what to do. I knew by heart the few books I had found in the ancient bookcases and in the garret. All the stories known to my old house-

keeper, Kirilovna, I had asked her to tell me over and over again and the songs of the peasants saddened me. I drank everything at hand, soft drinks and others, until my head ached. I will even admit that at one time I thought I should become a drunkard from sheer desperation, the worst kind of drunkard, such as this district offered me a good many examples.

My nearest neighbours consisted of two or three of these confirmed inebriates, whose conversations were forever interspersed with sighs and hiccoughs, so that even complete solitude was to be preferred to their society. I finally got into the habit of dining as late as possible and retiring as early as I could afterward, and in that way I solved the problem of shortening the evenings and lengthening the days.

About four versts from my house was a beautiful property belonging to the Countess B——. It was occupied by her steward, the Countess herself never having lived in the place but a month at a time, and that in the first year of her marriage.

One day, in the second year of this lonely existence of mine, I heard that the Countess and her husband were to occupy their residence during the summer months. In the early part of June, they arrived with all their household.

The coming of a rich neighbour is always an event in the life of country people. The owners of property and their servants also speak of it two months before they arrive, and it is still a topic of interest three years after they have left. For my part, the fact that a young and pretty woman would live so near upset me very much. I was dying to see her and the first Sunday after they were settled, I walked over after dinner to pay my respects to the lady and introduce myself as her nearest neighbour and her devoted slave.

A footman led me to the Count's library and left to announce me. This library was large and magnificently furnished. Against the walls were shelves filled with books and on each one was a figure in bronze; above a marble mantelpiece stood a large mirror. The floor was covered with green cloth over which were thrown rich Persian rugs. Unused as I was in my hovel to any kind of luxury, it was so long since I had seen anything like this display of wealth that I actually felt timid and experienced inward tremblings while waiting for the Count, such as a country solicitor might feel when asking an audience of a minister. The door opened and a young man, about thirty-two years of age, entered. He greeted me in a most cordial and

charming manner. I tried to appear at ease and was just going to make the usual commonplace remarks about being delighted at having such neighbours when he forestalled me by saying how welcome I was.

We sat down and his manner was so cordial that it soon dispelled my unusual timidity. I was just beginning to feel like my old self again, when the Countess appeared in the doorway and once more I grew desperately shy. She was a beauty. The Count introduced me and the more I tried to be natural and quite at ease, the more I looked awkward and embarrassed. My hosts, in order to give me time to recover from my bashfulness, chatted together as if to show that they considered me an old acquaintance already and one to be treated as such, so that while walking about the library I looked at the books and pictures. As far as pictures are concerned, I am no connoisseur, but there was one there that attracted my attention. It represented a Swiss scene, and the beauty of the landscape did not attract me quite as much as did the fact that the canvas was pierced by two bullets evidently fired one on the other.

"That is a pretty good shot!" I cried, turning toward the Count.

"Yes," said he, "and rather a peculiar one. Are you a pistol shot?" he added.

"Why yes, a fairly good one," I answered, delighted to have a chance to speak of something with which I was familiar. "I think I could hit a card at thirty paces, with my own pistols of course."

"Really?" said the Countess, seemingly much interested. "And you, my dear," this to her husband, "could you hit a card at thirty paces?"

"I don't know about that," answered the Count, "but I was a pretty good shot in my day, but it must be four years now since I used a pistol."

"In that case, sir," I continued, "I'll bet you anything that even at twenty paces you could not hit a card; because to excel at pistol-shooting one requires constant practice. I know this from experience. At home, I was considered one of the best shots in the regiment, but it happened once, that I was a month without using a pistol, mine being at the gunsmith's. We were called to the shooting-gallery one day and what do you think happened to me, sir? I missed a bottle standing twenty-five paces away, four times in succession. There was with us at the time a major of cavalry, a good fellow, who was for-

ever joking: 'Faith, my friend,' he said to me, 'this is too much moderation. You have too great a respect for the bottle.' Believe me, sir, one must practise all the time. Otherwise, one gets rusty. The best marksman I ever knew practised every day, firing at least three shots before his dinner; he would no more have missed them than he would have omitted his cognac before dinner." *

Both the Count and his wife seemed pleased to listen to me.

"And how did he shoot?" asked the Count.

"How? Let me tell you. He would see a fly on the wall . . . You laugh? Madam ——, I swear to you this is true. 'Eh! Kouska! a pistol!' Kouska would bring one loaded. Crack! there lay the fly flattened against the wall."

"What consummate skill!" cried the Count, "and what was this man's name?"

"Silvio, sir."

"Silvio!" cried the Count, starting to his feet. "You have known Silvio?"

"Have I known him? Well, rather. We were the greatest of friends; he was like one of us in the regiment. But it is five years now since I heard of him, and you also knew him?"

* It is the custom in Russia to take a glass of brandy before the soup.

"Yes, I knew him well. Did he ever tell you a peculiar thing which happened to him once?"

"How he received a slap in the face, one evening, from a cad?"

"And did he tell you the name of this cad?"

"No, sir, he did not. Ah!" I cried, guessing at the truth. "Forgive me, sir, I did not know. Can it be you?"

"Yes, it was I," answered the Count, in an embarrassed manner, "and that picture with a hole in it is a souvenir of our last interview."

"For God's sake, my dear," said the Countess, "don't speak of it—the thought of it terrifies me to this day."

"No," said the Count. "I feel I ought to tell this gentleman. He knows how I offended his friend and it is only fair that he should learn how he revenged himself."

The Count drew an armchair for me to sit in and I listened with the greatest interest to the following story:

"Five years ago we were married. We spent the first month of our honeymoon here in this house and to it clings the memory of the happiest days of my life, coupled with one of the most painful experiences I have ever had.

"One evening, we had both gone out horseback riding. My wife's horse became very restless and she was so frightened that she begged me to lead him to the stables and she would walk back by herself. On reaching the house, I found a travelling coach at the door and was told that a man was waiting in the library. He had refused to give his name, saying he wished to see me on business. I came into this room and in the half light I saw a man with a beard standing before the mantelpiece, still in his dusty travelling clothes. I drew nearer to him, trying to place him in my memory.

"'You do not remember me, Count?' said he, in a voice that shook.

"'Silvio!' I cried.

"And to be candid with you, I felt as if my hair were standing on end.

"'Exactly,' he continued, 'and it is my turn to shoot. I have come to fire. Are you ready?'

"I saw a revolver sticking out of his left pocket. I measured twelve paces and stood there in that corner, begging him to be quick about it, as my wife would return in a few moments. He said he wanted a light first and I rang for candles.

"I closed the door after giving orders not to admit anyone, and once more I told him to

proceed. He raised his pistol and took aim. . . . I was counting the seconds. . . . I was thinking of her. . . . All this lasted a full minute and suddenly Silvio lowered his weapon.

"'I am very sorry,' he said, 'but my pistol is not loaded with cherry pits . . . and bullets are hard. . . . After all, come to think of it, this does not look much like a duel. It is more like a murder. I am not in the habit of firing on an unarmed man. Let us begin all over again. Let us draw lots to see who will shoot first.'

"My head was in a whirl and it turns out that I refused at first. Finally, we loaded our pistols and we put two papers in the very cap I had once perforated with a bullet. I took one of the papers and as luck would have it, I drew number one.

"'You are devilish lucky, Count!' said he, with a smile I will never forget.

"I can not to this day understand it, but he finally compelled me to draw fire, . . . and my bullet hit that picture there."

The Count pointed to the landscape with the hole in it. His face was crimson. There was the Countess as white as a sheet, and as for me I barely suppressed a cry.

"I fired at him," continued the Count, "and thank God, I missed him.

"Then Silvio—at that moment he was positively hideous—stood back and took aim. Just then, the door opened. My wife came in and seeing us facing each other, threw herself in my arms. Her presence gave me back my courage.

"'My dear,' I said, 'do you not see that we are only jesting? How frightened you are! Go now, get a glass of water and come back to us. I will then introduce my old friend and comrade to you.'

"But my wife knew better than to believe my words.

"'Tell me, is what my husband says true?' she asked of the terrible Silvio. 'Is it true that this is only a jest?'

"'He is always jesting, Madam,' replied Silvio. 'Once upon a time he gave me a slap, in jest; again, in jest, he pierced my cap with a bullet and a few minutes ago, still jesting, he just missed me. Now it is my turn to laugh a little.'

"Saying which, he took aim once more, with my wife looking on. She fell on her knees at his feet.

"'Get up, Macha!' I cried enraged. 'Are you not ashamed of yourself! And you, sir, do

you wish to drive this poor woman crazy? Will you please fire, yes or no?"

"'I will not,' answered Silvio, 'I am satisfied. I saw you falter. You were pale with fright, and that is all I hoped to see. I compelled you to fire on me and I know you will never forget me. I leave you to your conscience.'

"He walked toward the door and turning round, he glanced at the picture with the bullet hole and without aiming at all, he fired, and doubled my shot. Then he went out. My wife fainted—none of the servants dared stop him and the doors opened before him in great haste. On the porch he called for his carriage and he was already some distance when I recovered from my bewilderment."

The Count stopped.

It was thus I heard the end of a story, the beginning of which interested me much. I have never seen Silvio. It was said that at the time of the insurrection of Alexander Ypsilanti, he was at the head of a regiment of rebels and that he was killed when their army was routed at Skouliani.

*March,* 1856.

# THE QUEEN OF SPADES

## *La Dame de Pique*

From the Russian of Pushkin

# THE QUEEN OF SPADES

## I

Russian literature is very little known among us. The great poet Pushkin and the modern Russian writers have been the object of serious study, but the literary movement of Russia has not been followed with the attention it deserves. The Russian language, in fact, is almost completely ignored in France. The interpreters and competent critics are missing. A writer known by his works, which will be read when the greatest romances of the present age will be forgotten, is a happy exception, for the author of Columba has turned toward Russian literature the same penetrating curiosity that he has devoted to the gypsies while he was composing Carmen. It is to Mérimée that we owe the translation of what we are going to read, and we will recognise in The Queen of Spades and the Bohemians two of those very rare productions to which this eminent spirit has given an original *cachet.* Pushkin could assuredly find no one better qualified to introduce him to French literature.—*(Note by the French Editor.)*

A GAME of cards was going on at Naroumof's, a lieutenant in the Guards. The long winter night had gone by without anyone noticing it, and it was five o'clock in the morning before supper was served. The winners sat down and filled their plates

in great spirits, while the losers looked gloomily on. But by degrees, with the help of champagne, the talk became animated and everyone joined in.

"How did you make out to-day, Sourine?" asked the master of the house of one of his friends.

"I have lost as usual; I really have no luck at all. You know how cool I am at cards; I never change my way of playing and I never win."

"Do you mean to say that through the whole evening, you never once put on the red? Well, such persistence is beyond me."

"What do you think of Hermann?" said one of the guests, pointing to a young officer of Engineers. "Never in his life has that fellow staked anything on a card, and still he can sit and watch us playing till five in the morning."

"The game interests me," said Hermann, "but I am not in a position to risk my small means on the chance of making more than I really need."

"Hermann is a German and consequently economical," cried Tomski; "but speaking of cards, one who is really astonishing is my grandmother, the Countess Anna Fedotovna."

"Why so?" asked his friends.

"Have you not noticed," continued Tomski, "that she never plays?"

"That is so," said Naroumof, "and for a woman of eighty not to touch a card is very unusual."

"You do not know why?"

"No. Is there a reason for it?"

"Yes, listen and I will tell you. You must know that sixty years ago, my grandmother went to Paris and created a furor. People ran after her carriage to see the Venus of Moscow, as she was called. Richelieu courted her and my grandmother vows that he nearly blew his brains out one night, because she was so distant with him. In those days women played faro, and one night at court she lost to the Duke of Orleans a very large sum of money. On reaching home, she took off her patches, divested herself of her frills and furbelows, and in this tragical undress went to my grandfather's room to tell him of her ill-luck and ask him to give her the money with which to pay her debt. My grandfather, who is now dead, had control of her money, and although he stood very much in awe of her, still, when she mentioned the sum she wanted, he jumped to his feet. He stormed and swore, and after making a rough calculation of the sums she had had in the last six months,

he showed her that she had spent half a million. He told her he had not his villages of the districts of Moscow and Saratef at his disposal in Paris, and finally ended by refusing point-blank to give her the amount she asked. You can perhaps imagine how furious my grandmother was—she struck him in the face and vowed she would never speak to him again. But the next morning she thought better of it and for the first time in her life, she actually brought herself to plead and argue with him. It was in vain that she told him that there were debts and debts, that one could not treat a prince like a tradesman; all her eloquence was thrown away on him, he was obdurate and would not give in. My grandmother was at a loss to know what to do, when she suddenly remembered that there was a very celebrated man to whom she might appeal. You have heard, no doubt, of the Count de St. Germain, of whom such wonderful tales are told. You know that he was a sort of Wandering Jew, the possessor of the elixir of life and the philosopher's stone. Some people made fun of him and called him a quack; Casanova in his memoirs calls him a spy. However, notwithstanding the mysterious life he led, Saint Germain was sought after by the very best people, and was certainly a charming man. To

this day, my grandmother, who was very fond of him, will fly in a rage if anyone speaks disrespectfully of him in her presence. Thinking he might advance her the sum she needed, she wrote him a note asking him to call and see her. The old wizard came immediately and found her in the depths of despair. In a few words she related her troubles, telling him of her husband's hard-heartedness, adding that her only hope now lay in his being able to help her. After a few minutes of deep thought, Saint Germain said: 'Madam, I could easily advance you the money you require, but I know that you would not be happy until you had returned it to me, and I don't want to help you out of one scrape to get you into another. There is one way by which you can settle your debt, and that is, to win back the money. . . .' 'But, my dear Count,' answered my grandmother, 'I have just told you that I have not a penny of my own. . . .' 'You don't need any,' continued Saint Germain, 'just listen to me.' And there and then he told her a secret which each one of you fellows would give a great deal to know."

The officers all listened attentively. Tomski stopped to fill and relight his pipe and continued in this way:

"That very night my grandmother played at Versailles, at a card party given by the Queen. The Duke of Orleans was banker and she told him some plausible story to explain her delay in settling her debt, after which she sat down and took three cards. The first one won; she doubled her stake on the second which won again, doubled once more on the third and finally came out a very large winner."

"Sheer luck!" said one of the officers.

"A fairy tale!" cried Hermann.

"Were the cards arranged beforehand then?" said a third.

"I don't think so," answered Tomski quietly.

"What!" cried Naroumof, "you have a grandmother who knows three winning cards, and you have not succeeded in coaxing her to tell you what they are?"

"Oh! there is the rub," answered Tomski. "She had four sons, one of whom was my father. Three of them were inveterate gamblers and not one of them could ever win from her this secret which, Heaven knows, would have been so useful to them and to me also. But listen to what my uncle, the Count Ivan Ilitch, told me, and this on his word of honour. You know Tchaplitzki—the one who died in penury after squandering millions—well, one day in his youth,

he lost to Zoritch something like three hundred thousand rubles. He was in despair about it, and went to his mother who was anything but forbearing with young men's escapades, but somehow she always was more indulgent with Tchaplitzki than with any of her other sons. She told him of three cards to stake on, one after the other, exacting from him a solemn promise never again to touch a card while he lived. Tchaplitzki sought Zoritch immediately and asked him for a chance to win back his money. On the first card, he put fifty thousand rubles; he won, doubled his stakes and won again. Finally with his three cards he settled his debt and even had something to the good. . . . But here it is six o'clock! Don't you think it is high time we all went to bed."

Each man emptied his glass and went home.

## II

The old Countess Anna Fedotovna was in her dressing-room, seated before a looking-glass, Three maids hovered about her; one held a rouge pot, another a box of pins and the third was adjusting an enormous lace cap, trimmed with

flaming coloured ribbons. The Countess could not now lay claim to any beauty, but she still persisted in keeping up the habits of her youth, decking herself in styles of fifty years ago, and taking as much pains with her dress as did any painted woman of the past century. Her *demoiselle de compagnie* was seated at the window, working on a piece of embroidery.

"Good-morning, Grandmamma," said a young officer entering the dressing-room. "How do you do, Mademoiselle Lisa. Grandmamma, I have come to ask you a favour?"

"What is it, Paul?"

"Will you allow me to present one of my friends to you and may I ask you to give him an invitation to your ball?"

"Bring him to my ball and you can introduce him then. Did you go to the Princess ——'s reception last night?"

"Of course, and we had a delightful evening. We danced until daylight, and Miss Eletzki was simply exquisite."

"Well, my dear boy, I must say that you are not hard to please. You should have seen her grandmother, the Princess Daria Petrovna. She was a beauty. But tell me, she must be pretty old, Princess Daria?"

"What do you mean," cried Tomski thought-

lessly, "why she has been dead these seven years."

The Countess's companion looked up from her work and made the young man a sign. He remembered immediately that orders had been given for no one to mention the death of any of the old lady's contemporaries in her presence. He could have bitten his tongue for forgetting; however, she received the news of her old friend's death with the greatest composure.

"Dead?" she said. "Strange that I never heard of it. We were appointed ladies in waiting together and when we were presented to the Empress . . ."

The old Countess related for the hundredth time some anecdote of her youth.

"Paul," she said when through with her story, "help me to get up. Lisanka, where is my snuff-box?"

And followed by her three maids, she disappeared behind a screen to complete her toilet. Tomski remained alone with Lisa.

"Who is this gentleman you wish to present to the Countess," she asked in low tones.

"Naroumof. Do you know him?"

"No. Is he in the army."

"Yes."

"In the Engineers?"

"No, in the Horse Guards. What made you think he was in the Engineers?"

The young girl smiled, but did not answer.

"Paul," cried the Countess from behind the screen, "send me a new novel, anything, only be sure it is not in the modern style."

"How must it be then, Grandmamma?"

"A novel in which the hero does not strangle either his father or mother, and where no one gets drowned. Nothing terrifies me more than drowning people."

"Where do you suppose I can find a novel of that kind? Would you like a Russian novel?"

"Pshaw! Are there Russian novels? Then send me one; you will not forget, will you?"

"I will be sure to remember. Good-bye, Grandmamma, I am in a great hurry. Good-bye, Lisabeta Ivanovna. What made you think Naroumof was in the Engineers?" And with that he went out.

Lisabeta Ivanovna, being left alone, went back to her sewing near the window. She was no sooner seated than there appeared at the corner of the street a young officer. His presence made the girl blush; she lowered her eyes and pretended to be very busy with her work. The

old Countess entered at that moment, dressed for the street.

"Lisanka," said she, "order the carriage, we will go for a drive."

Lisa rose immediately and began putting her work away.

"Well! What is the matter? Are you deaf? Go and tell them to harness immediately."

"I am going," answered the companion.

And she ran into the hall.

A servant entered carrying books sent by Prince Paul Alexandrovitch.

"Many thanks. Lisanka! Lisanka! Where has she gone to?"

"I was going to get my hat, Madam."

"We have plenty of time. Sit down here, take the first of these books and read to me."

The girl took up a book and read a few lines.

"Louder!" said the Countess. "What is the matter with you? Are you hoarse? Wait a minute, bring that stool nearer, now sit there and go on."

Lisabeta Ivanovna read on a couple of pages, the Countess yawning meanwhile.

"Throw away that tiresome book," said she. "What trash! Send them all back to Prince

Paul with my thanks. . . . And that carriage, will it never come?"

"Here it is," answered Lisabeta Ivanovna, looking out of the window.

"Well! and you are not ready? Will you never cease to keep me waiting—it is simply unbearable."

Lisabeta ran to her room. She had not been there more than a minute or two when the Countess rang the bell furiously; her three maids came in at one door, while a footman entered by another.

"Does no one hear me in this house," cried the Countess. "Let one of you go and tell Lisabeta Ivanovna that I am waiting for her."

The companion entered at this moment dressed for the street.

"At last, mademoiselle," said the Countess, "but what means this elaborate costume? Who is going to see you? Tell me what kind of a day is it. Windy, is it not?"

"No, your Excellency," said the footman, "on the contrary, it is quite mild."

"You never know what you are saying. Open the window. . . . It is just as I said; it is blowing a hurricane and is bitterly cold besides. I will not need the carriage. Lisanka,

my dear, we will not go out. You need not have gone to all the trouble of dressing up."

"What a life!" muttered the companion under her breath.

And, in truth, Lisabeta Ivanovna was a very unhappy girl.

"Thou shalt know by experience," said Dante, "how salt the savour is of other's bread and how sad a path it is to climb and descend another's stairs."

But who can depict the troubles of a young girl who is a companion to an old lady in high life? It was not that the Countess was wicked, but she possessed all the whims and fancies of a once pampered and fashionable woman. She was miserly, rude and as selfish as one can be who feels she is gradually being set aside by the world. She never missed a ball and she would sit in a corner all powdered and painted and look like a death's-head at a feast. Every one of her guests, as they came in, bowed profoundly before her, but this ceremony over, no one ever spoke to her again. She entertained the whole town, according to the etiquette of that day, but she never could call people by their right names. Her numerous servants, grown old and fat in her service, did pretty much as they pleased and pilfered to their hearts' content, as

if death had already entered the house. As for Lisabeta Ivanovna, she lived a life of misery. When she poured the tea, she was accused of wasting the sugar, when she read a novel to the Countess, the old lady held her responsible for all the author's vagaries and when out walking with her, she was blamed for the uneven pavements or the state of the weather. Her salary, which was very small, was never paid regularly, and still she was expected to dress well, "like everybody else," which meant in a way very few people could afford. When going out in society, her position was still more pitiful. She was known to everyone but nobody ever noticed her. She sometimes danced of an evening, but only when she was needed to fill up a set. Ladies would take her hand and lead her away with them when they needed someone to rearrange their dress. She was very proud and felt her position keenly. She lived on patiently, in the hope that some day a lover would break her fetters for her; but young men who did not object to a mild flirtation, took good care that their attentions were not noticed, though Lisabeta Ivanovna was ten times prettier and sweeter than some of the forward or stupid girls to whom they devoted their time. More than once, overcome by the luxury and loneliness of her sur-

roundings, she had left the drawing-room and retired to her own little room, barely furnished with a wooden bed, an old screen, a torn carpet and an old bureau with a small mirror. There, by the light of a solitary candle, she would cry her heart out.

One morning, two days after the evening at Naroumof's and about a week before the scene just described, Lisabeta was seated near the window, as usual, working at her embroidery, when happening to look out, she saw a young officer of Engineers standing on the corner looking at her. She lowered her eyes and went on working with renewed energy. After a few minutes she raised her eyes once more and saw that the officer was still looking at her. Not being in the habit of flirting with the young men who passed her window, she kept her eyes resolutely fixed on her work for more than two hours, until someone came to say that dinner was ready. Then having to rise and put away her work, she looked out and the young officer was still standing in the same place. This rather puzzled her. After dinner she drew her chair to the window, with some trepidation, but the officer was gone, and after a while, she forgot all about him.

Two days later, when about to enter the car-

riage with the Countess, she saw him once more standing near the door. His fur collar was turned up and she could only see his bold black eyes looking intently at her. Lisabeta felt frightened without knowing why, and took her seat in the carriage in fear and trembling.

On her return to the house, she flew to the window, her heart beating wildly; the officer was in his usual place, gazing at her with ardent glances. She drew back immediately, a prey to curiosity, and wondered at the strange feeling in her whole being, which she experienced for the first time in her life.

After this not a day went by without the officer appearing in the street, and very soon there was a mute understanding between them. Seated at the window, she could feel his presence and every time she looked up she allowed her glance to rest on him a little longer. The young fellow seemed very grateful for such an innocent favour; she noticed with the quick perception of youth that a deep glow suffused his brow every time their eyes met. By the end of a week, she smiled.

When Tomski asked his grandmother to be allowed to present one of his friends, the poor girl's heart beat to suffocation, and when she heard that Naroumof was in the Horse Guards,

she knew he could not be the officer she meant, and she regretted deeply having compromised her secret by letting a hare-brained fellow like Tomski share it.

Hermann was the son of a German, who had settled in Russia and had left him a small patrimony. Determined to be independent, Hermann had made it a point never to touch his income, and so he lived on his pay and never allowed himself the slightest luxury. He was reserved and ambitious, his reticence rarely giving his comrades a chance to make fun of him. Under an assumed calmness, he hid violent passions and a vivid imagination, but he was always master of himself and had avoided, so far, the erring ways of the average youth. A born gambler, he never touched a card, because he knew that in his position he could not risk losing his small inheritance for a possible gain at play; and still he would sit at the gaming tables, night after night, watching the rapid changes of the game with a feverish anxiety.

The queer story of the Count de St. Germain's three winning cards had left a deep impression on his mind, and he thought of it all night long. " If only," he kept saying to himself while walking through the streets of St. Petersburg the following night, " the old lady could be

persuaded to tell me her secret, if she would only name the three cards! I must be presented to her, maybe I could win her confidence, I might make love to her. . . . True, she is eighty-seven years old! She may die this week . . . to-morrow perhaps. . . . And after all, is there any truth in that story? No; economy, frugality and work, these must be my three winning cards. With them, I will double, I will increase my capital tenfold. They alone will give me independence and comfort."

Musing in this way, he found he had wandered into one of the fashionable quarters of the city, and was then at the door of a rather ancient looking house. The streets were filled with carriages, each one stopping in its turn before a brilliantly lighted mansion. He could see, through the open carriage doors, sometimes the small foot of a woman or the riding-boot of a general; an open-worked stocking or the dress-shoe of a diplomat. Fur capes or coats passed in succession before the magnificent footman at the door. Hermann stopped and asked a night watchman, huddled in his sentry-box:

"Whose house is that?"

"The Countess ——."

It was that of Tomski's grandmother.

Hermann started and recalled to mind the story of the three cards. He kept walking to and fro in front of the house, thinking of the woman who occupied it, of her wealth and her mysterious power. After reaching his barely furnished room, it was a long time before he could get to sleep, and when he did, visions of cards, of a green cloth, heaps of gold coins and bank-bills floated before his closed eyes. He dreamed how, staking on one card after the other, he kept winning incessantly, winning at every turn, pocketing gold coins and filling his pockets with bank-notes. On awaking, he sighed at not finding his imaginary treasure, and to divert his thoughts from this dream, he walked out once more in the direction of the Countess's house, which he reached in a short time. There was an irresistible attraction about it and he stopped to look up at the windows. In one of them he saw a young girl with black hair, bending gracefully over a book or maybe a piece of embroidery. She looked up and he beheld a fresh young face, whose pretty dark eyes attracted him. That moment decided his fate.

## III

Lisabeta Ivanovna was about to take her coat and hat off, when the Countess sent for her. She had ordered that the horses be harnessed again. While two sturdy footmen were helping the old lady into the carriage, Lisabeta, who was standing near, noticed that the young officer was close by; she felt him take her hand and put a paper into it, and before she could recover from her surprise, he had disappeared around the corner. She immediately hid the note in her glove, but during the whole drive, she neither heard nor saw what was going on. When out driving, the Countess was in the habit of asking endless questions.

"Who is the man who just bowed to us? What is this bridge called? What does that sign read?"

Lisabeta answered at random and was sharply reproved for her mistakes.

"What ails you to-day? What are you thinking of? Do you hear me? or is it that you think I am in my dotage and do not know what I am saying?"

But Lisabeta was not paying the slightest attention to the old lady's rambling talk. On

returning to the house, she ran to her room and drew the note from her glove. It was not sealed and so there was no excuse for not reading it. It was full of protestations of love; affectionate, but very respectful. It had been translated word for word from a German novel, but as Lisabeta did not know a word of German, she was quite pleased with it. Notwithstanding this, she felt very ill at ease, because it was the first time in her life that she had something to hide. She shuddered at the thought of being in correspondence with an unknown young man; and regretting her indiscretion she was at a loss to know what to do.

Would she cease to work near the window and by studied coolness discourage the young officer in his attentions—would she send back his note or answer it in a very decided manner, leaving no doubt as to her feelings in the matter? What should she do? Having no friend from whom she could seek advice, she finally decided to answer his note.

She sat down to write, drew some paper toward her and remained in deep thought. More than once she began a sentence, but tore up the paper before it was half completed. Sometimes she thought the wording was too blunt, and again she felt she was wanting in reserve. At last,

after much deliberation, she managed to compose a few lines to her satisfaction.

"I think," she wrote, "that your intentions are those of a gentleman, that you are sincere in what you write and are not trying to mislead me by your conduct, but you must know that our acquaintance can not proceed in this way. I am returning your letter, hoping you will not give me cause to regret my trust in you."

Next morning, as soon as she saw Hermann, she left her work, went into the drawing-room and opening the window, threw the letter in the street, confident that the young officer would not let it go astray. And she was right, for Hermann picked it up immediately and went into a pastry shop to read it. Not finding anything discouraging in the letter, he went home, rather pleased that this amorous intrigue should begin so well.

A few days later, a young girl with rather saucy looks, asked to speak to Mademoiselle Lisabeta, saying she had been sent by a certain milliner. Lisabeta received her with some trepidation, fearing an unsettled bill; but she was greatly surprised, on opening the paper handed to her, to recognise Hermann's handwriting.

"This is a mistake, the letter is not for me."

"I beg your pardon," answered the young

girl, smiling in a mischievous way, "but would you be so kind as to read it?"

Lisabeta glanced and saw that Hermann begged her to meet him.

"It is impossible!" she cried, frightened at the request itself and at the way it had been delivered. "I tell you this letter is not for me."

And with that, she tore it into bits.

"If that letter is not for you, Mademoiselle, then why did you tear it up?" continued the milliner's apprentice. "You should have sent it back to the one for whom it was intended."

"Oh! forgive me, dear child," said Lisabeta in dismay; "I beg of you never to bring me any more letters, and tell him who sent you that he ought to be ashamed of himself."

But Hermann was not a man to be easily discouraged. Every day Lisabeta received a letter in some way or other, and these were not German translations either. Hermann wrote under the stimulus of an ardent passion, and spoke a language with which he was familiar. Lisabeta could not hold out very long before this flood of eloquence. She eventually received the letters with pleasure and before long answered them. Each day the answers grew longer and were more affectionate. Finally, one day, she threw him at the window the following note:

"There is to be a ball at the Ambassador's to-night. The Countess is going and we will remain there until about two in the morning. This is how you can see me alone. As soon as the Countess leaves the house, about eleven o'clock, the servants will retire. The footman alone will be in the hall, and he is sure to be sleeping. Be here as soon as we leave and walk right in. If by any ill-luck you should meet anyone in the house, ask for the Countess and you will be told that she is not at home. In that case, you will have to leave, but in all probability you will not see anyone. The maids will all be in their rooms at the back of the house. After reaching the hall, turn to the left and walk straight ahead until you reach the Countess's bedroom. In there, behind a screen, you will find two doors; the one on the right is a dark closet, the other opens into a passageway, at the end of which is a small winding staircase that leads to my room."

Hermann, like a tiger scenting his prey, stood impatiently waiting for the appointed hour. At ten o'clock he was already there. The night was stormy, the wind blowing a hurricane and the snow falling heavily. The street lamps gave very little light and the thoroughfares were empty. Now and then, a cab came in view, the

driver whipping up his poor horse, while peering through the storm in the hope of finding a belated passenger. Clad in a thin overcoat, Hermann felt neither the wind nor the cold. At last the Countess's carriage appeared and he saw two robust footmen lift the old lady by the arms and place her in the cushioned carriage, where she sat wrapped in a fur cape. A minute later, in a thin cloak and with natural flowers entwined in her hair, Lisabeta hurried in after her. The door shut to and the carriage rolled away noiselessly over the soft snow. The footman closed the door of the house, the lights went out and everything was quiet once more, Hermann meanwhile walking up and down in the street. After a while, he looked at his watch and found it was twenty minutes of eleven. Leaning against a lamp post his eyes glued on the hands of his timepiece, he waited with impatience for the hour to come. Exactly at eleven o'clock, Hermann walked up the steps and, opening the door of the house, found to his joy that the hall was well lighted and that no one was in sight. With firm and quick steps, he entered the anteroom and found a footman fast asleep in a deep armchair. Hermann went by him softly and, passing through the dining-room and the drawing-room, which were not lighted,

he finally reached the Countess's bedroom, the reflection from the hall lamp being sufficient to guide his footsteps. A golden lamp was burning before a shrine filled with holy pictures. Gilt armchairs and divans, whose cushions were still soft though faded as to colour, were placed symmetrically along the walls, hung with China silk. Two large pictures, painted by Mme. Lebrun, attracted his attention on entering the room. One represented a man about forty years of age, stout and fair in looks, dressed in a light green coat and wearing a medal on his breast. The other was that of a fashionable young woman with delicate features, whose powdered hair, in which nestled a rose, was raised high above her brow. All about the room were numerous porcelain figures, vases of every description, clocks galore, baskets, fans and a hundred small toys, used by ladies of the last century, representing Montgolfier's balloons and the magnets discovered by Mesmer. Hermann went behind the screen where he perceived the two doors; to the right that of the dark closet and to the left the one opening into the passage, which led to the poor companion's little room. He opened this last door, but closed it again and entered the dark cabinet.

Time went by very slowly. An intense still-

ness reigned in the house. The clock in the drawing-room struck twelve and everything was quiet once more. Hermann was standing leaning against a cold stove. He was quite calm, his heart beating evenly, like that of a man who is determined to brave any dangers he may have to meet, knowing them to be inevitable. He heard the clock strike one, then two; and very shortly after came the distant rumbling of a carriage. For the first time that evening he felt his calm manner deserting him. The carriage drew nearer and finally stopped. Then there was quite a commotion in the house; the servants running hither and thither, their voices intermingling in a confused murmur; all the lights went up, the three maids entered the bedroom together, and the Countess, a walking mummy, was helped in and deposited in a huge armchair. Hermann saw Lisabeta pass close to him and heard her hurried steps down the passageway. In his inmost heart, he felt something very much like remorse, but he heeded it not, hardening his heart against it.

The Countess began to undress before a mirror; her maids took off her crown of roses, removing the powdered wig and revealing her own closely cropped white hair. The pins fell in showers about her and her yellow dress

trimmed with silver, slipped down to her misshapen and swollen feet. Hermann, much against his will, was made to witness a very unattractive night toilette. When the Countess was finally dressed in her night-gown and cap, she looked far less hideous in this costume, which was more suitable to her age, than she did in her gorgeous brocades.

Like most elderly people she suffered much from insomnia, and after being undressed, she settled herself in her armchair drawn up to the fireplace, ordered the lights put out and dismissed her attendants.

The Countess, wrinkled and yellow, with pendulous lips muttering, rocked herself to and fro for a little while, the lamp burning before the shrine shedding a dim light about her. There was a lack of intelligence in her sunken eyes, and she seemed to move not so much by her own accord as if by some hidden mechanism.

Suddenly her face changed, her lips ceased muttering and her eyes opened wide. Before her stood a stranger—it was Hermann.

"Do not be afraid, Madam," said Hermann in a low voice, but emphasising each word. "For God's sake, don't look like that. I will not hurt you. On the contrary I have come to ask a favour of you."

The old lady looked at him in silence as if she did not understand. Thinking she might be deaf, he leaned toward her and repeated what he had said. But still she remained speechless.

"You can, in a few words," continued Hermann, "make me supremely happy for the remainder of my life, and that without any cost to you. I know that you can tell me of three cards which . . ."

Hermann stopped. The Countess evidently understood what was wanted of her and seemed to be thinking of an answer:

"It was only a joke, I swear to you, nothing but a joke."

"No, Madam," answered Hermann in a hard voice. "Remember Tchaplitzki and how he won through you."

The Countess looked frightened and for a minute her face twitched but her features soon relaxed into a stupid stare.

"Will you not," said Hermann, "tell me the three winning cards?"

The Countess remained silent and he continued:

"For whom do you keep this secret? For your grandsons? They will be rich without it. They do not know the value of money, and they are spendthrifts. He who can not keep his in-

heritance will want some day, were he to have the power of the devil himself at his command. I am not a spendthrift. I know the value of money and the three winning cards will not be wasted on me."

He stopped, trembling in every limb and waited for her answer.

He knelt down.

"If your heart has ever known love, if you can remember its raptures, if you ever smiled on your first-born, if there is any human feeling in your breast, I beg of you, by the love you gave your husband and children, by all that you have held sacred, do not refuse my prayer; tell me your secret. Come now!—perhaps it is linked with a crime of your past life? Did you make a compact with the devil? Think well, you are very old, you may not have long to live. I will take all your sins on my conscience and will answer for them before God!—Tell me your secret!—Think how the happiness of one man lies in your power; not only mine, but that of my children and my grandchildren. We will honour you and bless your memory."

But the old lady never answered a word.

Herman rose.

"Curse you, you old hag!" he cried, gnashing his teeth. "I know a way to make you

speak." And with that he drew a revolver from his pocket.

At the sight of the weapon, the Countess, for the second time, showed some fear. She shook violently and put out a hand as if to ward off a blow, then suddenly falling back in her chair, she remained quite still.

"Come now, no more of this," cried Hermann, taking her hand. "I ask you for the last time, will you tell me what are the three cards, yes or no?"

There was no answer and Hermann realised that the Countess was dead.

## IV

Lisabeta Ivanovna, still in her ball dress, was seated in her room, wrapped in deep thought. On returning home, she had told her maid she would not need her and had hurried to her room, afraid to find Hermann there, wishing in her heart he had not come. At a glance, she saw he was not in the room, and she felt relieved that he had not succeeded in entering the house after all. She sat down, quite oblivious of the hour, and tried to recall the most trivial circumstances of the beginning of this intrigue, which in such

a short time had led her so far. Barely three weeks had gone by since she had first seen the young officer from her window, and she had already written to him, had even gone so far as to promise him a rendezvous at night. She knew his name, but that was all. She had received a number of letters, but he had never spoken to her; she did not even know the sound of his voice. Until that very evening, strange to say, she had not even heard of him in any way. But at the ball that night, Tomski, who was devoted to the young Princess Pauline, thinking that she was flirting too much with one of her numerous admirers, decided to try and make her jealous. So with this end in view, he asked Lisabeta for an endless mazurka. He teased her unmercifully about her partiality for young officers in the Engineers, and while pretending to know a great deal more than he really did, it happened, once or twice, that his remarks went home and Lisabeta began to think that her secret had been discovered.

"But tell me," she said smilingly, "where did you hear all this?"

"From a friend of this officer in question, a queer character."

"And what is the name of this queer fellow?"

"He is called Hermann."

Lisabeta did not answer but she grew cold with fright.

"Hermann is a romantic fellow," continued Tomski. "He has the profile of Napoleon and the soul of Mephistopheles. I think he has at least three crimes on his conscience. But what makes you so pale?"

"I have a headache. But tell me, did this Mr. Hermann, is that his name? tell you anything else?"

"Hermann is very much annoyed with the officer we are speaking of. He says that in his place he would act differently. To my mind, Hermann is in love with you himself, for he listens with unusual interest to his friend's confidences about you."

"But where has he seen me?"

"At church perhaps; out driving or may be some night in your room while you were asleep. He would dare do anything."

Just then, three ladies came forward, according to the rules of the mazurka, and bowing profoundly before him, asked him to choose between *forgetfulness* or *regret,** thereby in-

* Each of these words represents one of the ladies. The gentleman pronounces one of them and has to dance with the one to whom the word belongs.

terrupting a conversation which had roused Lisabeta's curiosity to a pitiful degree.

The lady, whom the lottery of the mazurka assigned as a partner to Tomski, happened to be the Princess Pauline. A long explanation took place between them during the repeated evolutions of the dance and the slow returning of his lady love to her seat. On rejoining his former partner, Tomski had forgotten all about Hermann and Lisabeta Ivanovna. She tried in vain to resume the conversation where they had left off, but the mazurka ended just then and the old Countess rose to leave.

Tomski's mysterious phrases were such as any man might use to keep up a conversation during a dance, but the Countess's companion had taken them to heart. The picture he drew of Hermann seemed to her remarkably true, and she was just romantic enough to see in what was really an insignificant face, something that both charmed and frightened her.

She was drawing off her gloves, the flowers in her hair drooping over her bare shoulders, when suddenly the door opened and Hermann entered. She started.

"Where were you?" she asked him tremblingly.

"In the Countess's bedroom," answered Hermann. "I have just left her; she is dead."

"My God!" she cried, "what are you saying!"

"And I am afraid," he continued, "that I have been the cause of her death."

Lisabeta looked at him aghast and recalled the phrase Tomski had used when speaking of him: "He has at least three crimes on his conscience." Hermann deliberately sat down by the window and told her what had happened.

She listened in horror. Could it be possible that that bold and determined wooing, those passionate letters and endearing terms were not inspired by love, but that money alone was his motive. She only had her heart to give and how could she expect to make him happy. Poor child! She understood now that she had been the tool of a thief, of the murderer of her old benefactress and she wept bitterly in an agony of remorse. Hermann sat in silence looking at her, but neither the tears of the unfortunate woman, nor even her beauty, which was enhanced by her grief, could appeal to this man of steel. He felt no sorrow or regret at the death of the Countess, his one and only thought being, that with her had died the secret which was to have made his fortune.

"You are a monster!" cried Lisabeta, after a while.

"I did not mean to kill her," he answered. "My revolver was not even loaded."

They remained silent for some time, not even looking at each other. Day was breaking. Lisabeta blew out the candle which had burned down to its socket and gradually the room grew lighter. She wiped her eyes, swollen with tears, and looked at Hermann. He was standing at the window with his arms folded, frowning. In that attitude he reminded her forcibly of Napoleon and the resemblance startled her.

"How will I ever get you out of the house?" she said at last. "I meant to show you the secret stairway, but to do that I must pass the Countess's room and I am too terrified . . ."

"Just tell me where to find the stairway and I can manage the rest."

She rose and looked in a drawer; she found a key which she handed to Hermann, giving him the necessary instructions. He took her cold hand in his, kissed her lightly on the forehead and left the room.

He went down the spiral staircase and entered the Countess's room once more. She lay in her chair, her body quite stiff but her features somewhat relaxed. He stood and looked long at

her to make sure of the horrible reality; then entering the dark cabinet, he groped along the wall and found a small door opening on a staircase. While going down, strange thoughts came into his head: "Down this staircase," he was saying to himself, "about sixty years ago, at this hour, I daresay some gallant long since buried could have been seen leaving this bedroom. I can picture him in embroidered coat, a cocked hat held close under his arm, and now after all these years, the heart of his mistress has also ceased to beat."

At the foot of the staircase, he found another door which he opened with his key. It led to a passageway which ended at the street.

## V

Three days after this fatal night, at nine in the morning, Hermann entered the convent where lay the remains of the old Countess. He experienced no remorse, and still he could not but feel that he was the murderer of that poor woman. Having no faith, he was, as is usually the case, very superstitious. Firmly convinced that the dead Countess could exert an evil

influence over his life, he imagined he could appease her wrath by attending her funeral.

The church was crowded and he found it difficult to secure a seat. The body was lying in state on a rich catafalque under a velvet canopy. The Countess lay in her coffin with hands crossed on her breast, dressed in a white satin gown and lace cap. Around the bier the family was assembled; the servants in black, and with ribbons on their shoulders bearing the family coat-of-arms, stood with lighted tapers in their hands. Although the relatives, the children, grandchildren and even the great-grandchildren were all in deepest mourning, still not one amongst them shed a tear—it would have looked too much like affectation on their part. The Countess was so old that no one was surprised at her death, and for a long time now she had been considered dead, as far as the world was concerned.

A celebrated preacher pronounced the funeral oration. In a few simple words, he spoke of the final end of the just who have been preparing for the last summons by living a good and pure life: "The angel of death took her away," said the orator. "While she was in the midst of pious meditations, he came like a thief in the night." The service ended in silence, after which the relatives drew near to look at

the body for the last time. Following them the invited guests came, each in turn, to bow once more before her, who had been for so many years a sort of death's-head at their feasts. The servants were last, and one old woman of the same age as the Countess was led to the bier by two serving-women. She had not the strength to kneel, but tears rolled down her cheeks when she kissed her old mistress's hand.

Hermann also came forward and knelt for a moment on the flagstones strewn with pine. Then rising, as pale as death, he mounted the steps leading to the catafalque and bowed. . . . When suddenly it seemed to him that the dead woman was looking at him in a mocking way, and he actually believed that she winked at him. He fell back in horror and someone helped him down. At that moment Lisabeta Ivanovna dropped down in a faint on the church floor. This incident disturbed the quiet of the funeral services for a few minutes; the assistants whispered amongst themselves and a chamberlain, who was a near relative of the Countess, said to an Englishman standing near him: "That young officer is a son of the Countess—left-handed of course." To which the Englishman answered: "Indeed!"

All day long Hermann felt very unhappy.

In the quiet restaurant where he usually took his meals, he drank a great deal in the hope of steadying his nerves, but the wine only increased his perturbation, giving free rein to his troubled thoughts. He returned home early and, without undressing, threw himself on his bed and fell into a heavy sleep.

When he woke it was night and the rays of the moon lit up his room. He looked at the time; it was a quarter of three. He could not go to sleep again, so he sat on his bed thinking of the old Countess.

Just then some one passed in the street and drawing near the window looked in, but Hermann paid no attention. A minute later, the door of the anteroom opened. He thought it was, no doubt, his servant, drunk as usual, when suddenly he realised that those were not his footsteps and that someone was coming. He heard the sound of slippered feet on the floor. The door opened and a woman in white came into the room. Hermann looked up, expecting to see his old nurse and wondering at the same time what could have brought her at this hour of the night, when the white figure crossing the room rapidly reached the foot of his bed, and he recognised the Countess.

"I come to you against my will," said she

He heard the sound of slippered feet on the floor. The door opened and a woman in white came into the room.

*An etching from a drawing by G. Fraipont.*

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G. Fraipont. del.

in a firm voice. "I am compelled to accede to your wish. Three—seven—ace—these cards played one after the other, will win a fortune for you; but you must not play more than one card at a time in twenty-four hours, and for the rest of your life, you must never touch a card again. I will forgive you my death, on condition that you marry my companion, Lisabeta Ivanovna."

After saying these words, she walked to the door and went out still dragging her slippers after her. Hermann heard her close the door of the anteroom and a minute later, a white figure passed in the street beneath his window and stopped for an instant as if to look in, then disappeared.

For some time Hermann sat dumfounded. Then rising, he walked into the anteroom to find his servant fast asleep on the floor, dead drunk. He found it hard to wake him and then he could get no explanation from him. The door of the anteroom was locked. Hermann went back to his room and wrote down the circumstances of his vision.

## VI

Two fixed ideas can not exist in the mind at the same time any more than two physical bodies can occupy the same space at the same moment. Three — seven — ace — soon blotted out the death of the Countess from Hermann's mind. Three — seven — ace — never left the thoughts and were on his lips every minute of the day. Did he meet a pretty girl on the street: "What a fine figure," he would say, "She looks like a three of hearts." Did anyone ask him the time, he would answer: "Half-past seven of diamonds." All stout men reminded him of an ace. Three—seven—ace—followed him in dreams and appeared to him under different forms. The threes blossomed out like magnolias; while sevens opened like doors of Gothic architecture and aces hung from ceilings like enormous spiders. Each and every one of his thoughts was centred on the one idea: How to utilize this secret bought so dearly? If he asked for leave to travel a while, he kept saying to himself he would surely find a gaming table in Paris, where he could make his fortune in three strokes. As it happened, luck came his way.

There was in Moscow, a club of rich gamblers, headed by the well-known Tchekalinski who had spent the greater part of his life at the gaming-tables; he was very rich, as he raked in bank-bills and never risked anything higher than a silver coin. His magnificent house, his excellent table and his fascinating manner had won him a host of friends and the esteem of people in general. He came to live in St. Petersburg and the youth of the town thronged his rooms, neglecting the balls and dances for the nights at cards, preferring the excitement of the green cloth to the attractions of coquettes. Hermann was brought to Tchekalinski by Naroumof.

They crossed a seemingly endless suite of rooms through which eager and polite servants guided them. The place was crowded. Generals and judges were playing whist while young men sitting on divans sipped ices or smoked long pipes. In the principal drawing-room in front of a long table, where crowded about twenty players, the master of the house held the bank at faro. He was a man about sixty years of age with a gentle and noble bearing and with hair as white as snow. On his round pleasant face, one could read good-nature and kindness—his eyes were forever smiling.

When Naroumof introduced Hermann, Tchekalinski immediately held out his hand and bade him welcome, adding that he hoped he would make himself quite at home in his house, and then resuming his seat he went on shuffling.

The playing proceeded for some time; there were stakes on more than thirty cards at once. At each turn, Tchekalinski stopped to give the winners time to double their stakes, paid, listened courteously to any claim, and still with greater courtesy corrected the mistakes made by some heedless young fellows.

Finally the game ended; Tchekalinski shuffled the cards and began a new one.

"Will you allow me to take a card," said Hermann, stretching a hand over a very stout man occupying much space on that side of the table.

Tchekalinski, smiling graciously, bowed in acquiescence. Naroumof congratulated Hermann on putting an end to his rigid rule of conduct, wishing him much luck for his début at cards.

"All right!" said Hermann, after writing a figure on the back of his card.

"How much?" asked the banker, his eyes blinking. "Pardon me, but I can not see from here."

"Forty-seven thousand rubles," said Hermann.

At this, all heads went up and every glance was directed toward Hermann.

"He has gone crazy," thought Naroumof.

"Allow me to tell you, sir," said Tchekalinski, with his everlasting smile, "that your play is a little high. No one here has ever staked more than two hundred and seventy-five rubles on a single card."

"Very likely," said Hermann, "but will you take my stake, yes or no?"

Tchekalinski bowed in assent.

"I merely wished to say," he added, "that though I am quite sure of my friends, still I do not care to deal out a card except on money down. I am satisfied that your word is sufficient, but for the regularity of the game and to facilitate the counting of the stakes, I would thank you to put up your money."

Hermann drew a note from his pocket and handed it to Tchekalinski who after glancing at it laid it on the card.

He dealt out a ten to the right and a three to the left.

"I win," said Hermann, showing his card.

A murmur of astonishment ran through the room. For a moment, the banker's brows con-

tracted, but immediately his habitual smile reappeared on his face.

"Will I pay you now?" he asked of the winner.

"If you will be so kind."

Tchekalinski took some bank-notes from his safe and paid immediately. Hermann pocketed his winnings and left the table. Naroumof gazed at him in amazement. Hermann drank a glass of lemonade and went home.

The following night he came back to Tchekalinski's house, and found the latter was still banker. Hermann drew near the table and this time the players made room for him and Tchekalinski bowed in a pleasant way.

Hermann waited for a new deal, then taking a card, he placed his forty-seven thousand rubles on it, adding besides the gains of the evening before.

Tchekalinski dealt out the cards. A jack came out on the right, a seven to the left.

Hermann showed a seven.

At this there was a general exclamation. Tchekalinski looked decidedly ill at ease, but he counted out ninety-four thousand rubles and handed them to Hermann, who taking them coolly, rose and quietly left the room immediately.

He appeared once more the following night, at the usual hour. Everybody was waiting for him; the generals and judges forsook their whist to watch such extraordinary play, the young officers deserted their divans. In fact, the whole house crowded into the room. They all surrounded Hermann when he entered, and the other players stopped betting, so impatient were they to see him fight it out with the banker, who, though pale, still smiled when he saw him nearing the table prepared to play alone against him. Each one opened a pack of cards at the same time. Hermann cut; then taking a card, he covered it with bank-notes. Such a profound silence reigned in the room that one might have thought these were the preliminaries of a duel instead of a game.

Tchekalinski began to shuffle, his hands trembling noticeably. To the right came out a queen, to the left an ace.

"Ace wins," said Hermann, turning up his card.

"Your queen loses," said Tchekalinski in a soft voice.

Hermann shuddered. Instead of an ace he had a queen of spades before him. He could not believe his eyes, at a loss to understand how he could have made such a mistake.

With his eyes glued to the fatal card, he fancied that the queen of spades looked at him mockingly. He even saw a strange resemblance between it and the dead Countess. . . .

"Damn you, you old hag!" he cried in horror.

Meanwhile Tchekalinski, with a sweep of his rake, gathered in all the money. Hermann sat motionless for some time, and when he finally left the table, he turned to the other men and broke out into a loud laugh. "A wonderful game!" said all the players. Tchekalinski shuffled the cards and the play went on.

### CONCLUSION

Hermann has become insane. He is in the Asylum d'Oboukhof—number seventeen. He never answers any question put to him but mutters forever: Three—seven—ace!—three—seven—queen!

Lisabeta Ivanovna has just been married to the son of the Countess's business agent. He has a fine position and is a good fellow besides. Lisabeta has taken a young girl, a poor relative, to live with her and superintends her education.

Tomski is now Major of Cavalry. He is married to Princess Pauline.

# THE BOHEMIANS

From the Russian of Pushkin

## THE BOHEMIANS

NOISY tribes of gypsies go wandering about in Bessarabia; and to-day they set their tents on the river's edge. Their nights are peaceful, for sweet is sleep in the open air. Between the wheels of the wagons and behind torn rugs one can see their fires burning, for supper is being cooked for the clan; the horses graze about on the grass and a tame bear has found a resting-place near one of the tents. There is great commotion all about, for to-morrow, at dawn, they break camp and each one makes his preparations with joy. The women sing, the children shout and hammers resound here and there.

But soon sleep settles on this vagabond troop and the silence of the steppe is not broken, except by the barking of dogs and the neighing of horses. All is quiet, the fires die out, and high in the sky the moon alone sheds its light on the sleeping tribe.

In a tent by himself, an old man is still awake. Seated before some dying embers and

trying to get some heat from them, he looks over the plain, where the mists of night are stealing down. His daughter has gone out roaming by herself; she knows no will but her own. She is sure to return, but here it is night, the moon will soon disappear behind the clouds on the horizon. Zemfira is very late and the old man's supper has grown cold waiting for her.

But here she comes and with her on the steppe is a young man unknown to the old gypsy.

"Father," says the young girl, "I have brought you a guest. I met him behind the Kourgane (tumulus) over there and I brought him to the camp for the night. He wants to become a gypsy like us. He is a fugitive from justice, but he will find a good helpmeet in me. His name is Aleko and he says he will follow me wherever I go.'

*The Old Man.*—It is well, remain under the shadow of our tent until the morrow, longer if you wish. We will share our shelter and our food with you, be one of us. You will soon get used to our manner of living, our wandering life, our poverty and independence. Choose a trade; be a blacksmith, or sing to passers-by, while leading the bear from town to town.

*Aleko.*—I will remain.

*Zemfira.*—He is mine and who dares take

him from me? but it is growing late. The new moon has disappeared—the mist is over the land and my eyes are closing.

It is day. The old man wanders with slow steps around the silent tent.

"Up, Zemfira, the sun has risen! Wake up, my young friend, it is time to rise. Come. children, leave your beds now."

Immediately the whole troop gets up with a clatter. The tents are folded, the wagons made ready to start. Everything moves at once and in this way they cross the lonely plains. The donkeys lead the procession carrying the smallest children in their baskets. Behind them come the husbands and brothers, the wives and daughters, young and old. What a noise! What an uproar! To the gypsy's song, the bear's grunts are heard as an accompaniment, as he tugs impatiently at his chain. What a display of rags in all colours of the rainbow! The dogs bark at the droning of the bagpipes, while the wheels creak over the gravel. Such a crowd! such poverty, such uncouthness! But they are all so full of life, so animated, that they make us ashamed of our idleness, our laziness and the monotony of our lives.

The young man glances over the desolate plain in a discouraged way. He dares not ad-

mit even to himself the cause of his sadness. Zemfira, the beautiful gypsy with the black eyes is there by his side, he is now free with the world before him. Overhead, the radiant sun shines in the splendour of midday, then why does his heart sink in his breast? What secret anguish troubles him?

. . . . .

"The birds of the air know neither care nor toil. Why should they labour to put up a strong and durable bed? The night is long, the branch of a tree is sufficient to sleep on. When the sun rises in all its glory, the birdlings, hearing the voice of God in that of nature, shake out their feathers and trill forth a song.

"When spring is over, when nature is at its best, summer comes with its burning heat; then the late fall bringing in its turn mists and winter. Poor things! sad is their lot! Toward distant countries, to warmer climates beyond the dark blue sea, the birdlings take their flight."

And the nomad is like the careless bird. There is no settled home for him, there are no customs nor habits. Everything to him is a road and he finds a shelter anywhere for the night. He wakes at dawn and leaves his day in the hands of God. Life's work never disturbs

the equanimity of his indolent nature. Sometimes the delights of fame dazzle his eyes, like a distant star; again he remembers the comforts and pleasures of bygone days. The thunder often rumbles over his head, but he sleeps on as serenely with the storm raging about him as he does under a clear blue sky.

And so Aleko lived on in this way, trying to forget the tricks played him by blind fate. In days gone by, Heaven knows what passions had held sway in his heart! how they had burst the bonds of that tortured heart of his! All that is dead and gone now. . . . Forever? Will they not come to life again some day? Let him wait and see!

*Zemfira.*—Friend, tell me, do you regret what you left behind?

*Aleko.*—What have I left?

*Zemfira.*—You know . . . your family, the cities . . .

*Aleko.*—I regret nothing. If you knew, if you could only picture to yourself the bondage of cities where one suffocates! The men are housed in crowds, they never breathe the fresh morning air, nor do they inhale the spring-like perfume of the prairies. They are afraid to love, and as for thought, they drive it away from

them. Their independence has a marketable value. Creeping at the feet of idols, they demand money and with it receive fetters. What have I left? Thoughtless treachery, prejudices beyond appeal, the senseless hatred of crowds or else dishonour set on a pedestal resplendent with glory.

*Zemfira.*—But there you can see beautiful mansions, rugs of a thousand hues, brilliant entertainments . . . and the women's clothes, how costly they are!

*Aleko.*—The delights of cities! what an empty din it all proves to be; there you find neither love nor true happiness. The women . . . Ah! how much more precious you are —you who do not need their finery, neither their pearls nor their dresses to set you off. But you will never be untrue to me, will you, my love? Say never! My only wish is to share love, peace and a willing exile with you.

*The Old Man.*—You love us, you who were born amongst the rich of this earth; but he who has known the delights of wealth can never be reconciled to this life of poverty. Here is a story told amongst our people. One day a man came to this country from the South; he had been sent in exile by his king. In days gone by I knew his name; but I have forgotten it

now. Old in years, he was young at heart and eager to do right. He had the divine gift of song and his voice was as sweet as the murmuring brook. Everyone loved him. He lived on the Danube, harming no one and delighting young and old with his tales. He was skilled in any trade, was as timid and weak as a child. Game and fish were brought to him and when the bitter winds of winter swept over the land, loving hands prepared a downy couch for this saintly old man. But he never could be reconciled to this life of poverty. He grew pale and thin: "God's wrath," he would say, "pursues me for the one error of my life," and daily he looked for the release which never came. Wandering on the banks of the Danube, he moaned incessantly and shed bitter tears at the thought of his distant country. At last, when dying, he begged to have his body buried in the South, believing that even after his death, there would be no peace for him in this land of exile.

*Aleko.*—And this is the fate of thy children, O Rome! thou sovereign of the world! Psalmist of love, psalmist of the gods, tell me what is glory? an echo from the grave, a cry of admiration, a rumour coming down the ages, or is it the tale of a wild gypsy, told under the shelter of a smoke-filled hut.

Two years have gone by, and as is their wont, the gypsies continue their joyous and vagabond life, finding everywhere the same peace and hospitality. Aleko, by this time, has released himself from the chains of a civilized world: as free as his hosts, without a regret or a care, he has taken his place by their camp-fire. He has been true to his new friends and, forgetting the days of long ago, has adopted their customs. Like them, he enjoys the shelter of a tent, and has known the intoxication of their eternal idleness; he even loves their tongue, which, though scant, is sonorous.

Leaving his lair in the wood near by, the bear has become a guest in his tent. In the villages and along the road which leads to the capital of Moldavia, he dances clumsily in the midst of a cautious crowd. He growls and pulls incessantly at his chain. Leaning on his stick, the old man beats time on his tambourine, while Aleko leads the animal and sings. Zemfira goes among the villagers and receives their voluntary contributions. Then night comes, they all sit down to a meal of corn they have not harvested. The old man falls asleep, the fire goes out and all is quiet within their tent.

By the rays of the rising sun, one day in the

spring the old man tries to warm his blood, growing cold with age. Before a crib his daughter sings a love song; Aleko listens as pale as death.

*Zemfira.*—Jealous one, wicked one, tear me to pieces, burn me at the stake, I fear thee not. I fear not the knife nor the flames. I abhor thee, I despise thee and I love another; I die for love of him.

*Aleko.*—Stop that, your singing tires me. I do not like those wild songs.

*Zemfira.*—You do not like my songs? What do I care! I sing them to please myself.

(She sings:)

"Tear me to pieces, burn me at the stake, I will not say a word; jealous one, wicked one, thou wilt never know his name.

"He is sweeter than the spring-time, more ardent than a summer's day; how young and bold he is! and how he loves me!

"How I caressed him when you slept the other night! how we laughed together at your white hairs."

*Aleko.*—Stop, Zemfira! I have heard enough.

*Zemfira.*—And so you think the song applies to you?

*Aleko.*—Zemfira!

*Zemfira.*—Get angry if you like. . . . Yes, I am singing the song for you.

(She goes out humming the refrain.)

*The Old Man.*—How well I remember when that song was first heard; it amused everyone, it made people laugh. When camping out on the steppe of Kagoul, on a winter's night my poor Maryoula used to sing it to our little daughter while rocking her by the camp-fire. In my mind the years gone by become more indistinct every day, but that song has never left my memory.

Everything is silent. It is night; toward the South, the moon shines in the bright blue sky. Zemfira wakes the old man.

*Zemfira.*—Father! Aleko frightens me. Listen. He is sleeping heavily, he moans and cries.

*The Old Man.*—Do not wake him, make no noise. Do you not know the Russian saying: "At midnight, the Evil One grips the throat of sleepers, at dawn he disappears." Stay here with me.

*Zemfira.*—Father, he speaks, he calls me.

*The Old Man.*—He wants you even in his dreams. You are dearer to him than life itself.

*Zemfira.*—His love wearies me. My heart

craves its freedom once more; as it is . . . But listen, he is calling out another's name.

*The Old Man.*—What name?

*Zemfira.*—Listen; what a fearful groan! he gnashes his teeth, I must wake him.

*The Old Man.*—You will try in vain. Do not interfere with the Evil Spirit, he will leave him presently.

*Zemfira.*—He moves, he is waking, I will go to him. Sleep, father.

*Aleko.*—Where were you?

*Zemfira.*—I was with my father. An Evil Spirit was haunting you a little while ago. You seemed to be in great pain when dreaming. You frightened me; you groaned, you gnashed your teeth and then you called my name.

*Aleko.*—I was dreaming about you. It seemed that between us . . . Oh! it was a horrible dream.

*Zemfira.*—Dreams lie always. Do not believe them.

*Aleko.*—Oh! I believe in nothing now, neither in dreams nor loving promises, not even in you.

*The Old Man.*—Why do you sigh forever, poor fool? Men are free here, the sky is cloudless and the women boast for their beauty. Do not weep, sorrow will kill you.

*Aleko.*—Father, she does not love me any more.

*The Old Man.*—Be comforted, dear friend, she is only a child. There is no reason for your sadness. Love for you means sorrow and pain, it is a pastime to a woman. Look under that blue vault up above, how the moon wanders about freely over all nature. She perceives a cloud and suddenly she lightens it up; it becomes radiant. But she quickly passes on to another, she never stops long. Who can assign a place for her in the Heavens? Who will say: "Remain here?" And so it is with the heart of a woman, for who can say: "But one lover, thou must never change!" Be comforted, Aleko.

*Aleko.*—But she loved me so, in days gone by! How tenderly she lay against my breast when we halted on the steppe! How rapidly the hours of the night went by! As happy as a child, with a whispered word or a loving kiss, she banished all sadness from me. Zemfira untrue to me! Zemfira to have ceased loving me! . . .

*The Old Man.*—Listen while I tell you a story about myself. A long time ago, when the Moscovite had not yet terrorised the Danube—you see how far back that is—I speak of the days when we feared the Sultan's name,

when a pacha governed Boudjak from the towers of Ackerman. I was young then, my heart overflowed with happiness and in my thick hair no silver threads could be found. Amongst our fair beauties there was one . . . who was the light of my life. At last she became mine. Ah! time flew by like a shooting-star, but you have known love, even though a shorter time than I. Maryoula loved me for a year.

Once near the waters of Kagoul, we met an unknown tribe, they were gypsies also. They set their tents near ours at the foot of the mountain, and for two nights they remained with us—they left on the third—Maryoula went with them. I was sleeping peacefully when day dawned. I woke up and she was not there. I looked for her, I called. . . . there was not a trace of her. Little Zemfira cried and so did I. . . .

From that day to this, all the women in the world have been as nothing to me. Never again have my glances rested on any of them, never have I wished for one of them for a companion.

*Aleko.*—But why did you not follow the villain? What was there to prevent you from plunging your dagger in his heart, when he had robbed you of your false love?

*The Old Man.*—But why? Is not youth al-

ways headstrong? What power can detain love? The joys of life are for each and every one of us and what has been can never be again.

*Aleko.*—Such is not my mood. I will not give up my rights without a struggle, or at least taste the sweets of revenge. No, were I to see my rival asleep by the sea, on the brink of a precipice, curse me if my foot would not push him into the abyss. Were he defenceless and at my mercy I would throw him into the waves, I would rejoice to see his terror on awaking, his agony would be bliss to me, and the sound of his fall would be like music unto my ears for days to come, bringing joy to my heart.

*A Young Gypsy.*—Just one more kiss! only one!

*Zemfira.*—Good-bye! My husband is jealous and wicked.

*The Young Gypsy.*—Only one, but a long, loving one, as a farewell. . . .

*Zemfira.*—Farewell? I am afraid he will come. . . .

*The Young Gypsy.*—Tell me, when will we see each other again?

*Zemfira.*—To-night, when the moon disappears—over there at the Kourgane near the tomb.

*The Young Gypsy.*—I do not believe you! You will not come!

*Zemfira.*—Run, my friend. Here he is—I will be sure to come.

Aleko is sleeping; a disquieting dream troubles him and he wakes up crying out. With jealous instinct he puts out a hand, which clutches only a cold coverlet—his companion is not there. Trembling in every limb, he rises. He shivers and the next moment is in a fever. He leaves the tent and, as pale as death, circles around the wagons. There is no noise, the plain is silent. The night is dark, the moon has disappeared in a mist, but by the faint glimmer of the stars he can make out footsteps in the dew. They lead to the Kourgane. He follows them hurriedly and reaches the white tombstone near the path. He is overwhelmed by a sinister foreboding, he totters as he walks, his lips tremble, his knees bend under him. He draws nearer. . . . Is this a dream? Two shadows are there, close to him, and he hears the murmur of voices answering each other on the desecrated tomb.

*First Voice.*—I must go now.

*Second Voice.*—Stay a little while longer.

*First Voice.*—I must, dear. Let us part.

*Second Voice.*—No, no, let us remain here until daybreak.

*First Voice.*—The hours go by swiftly.

*Second Voice.*—What a timid little love it is! Just one moment!

*First Voice.*—I will be missed. What if my husband should wake and find me gone?

*Aleko.*—He did wake. Where are you running to? Remain here both of you. You are very comfortable there; yes, there on the tomb.

*Zemfira.*—Run, my love, run!

*Aleko.*—Stop! Where are you running to, young man? Here, take this.

*Zemfira.*—Aleko!

*The Gypsy.*—I am a dead man!

*Zemfira.*—Aleko, do not kill him! But you are covered with blood! What have you done?

*Aleko.*—Nothing. Now come inhale his love.

*Zemfira.*—I am not afraid of you—I despise your threats. Murderer, I curse you.

*Aleko* (stabbing her).—You will die too.

*Zemfira.*—I die loving him.

The east is lit up by the sun's first rays. Aleko, covered with blood and with his knife still in his hand, sits on the tomb. At his feet

lie two bodies. His face is convulsed—frightened gypsies surround him. On the Kourgane itself, men are digging a grave; one after the other, the women come forward and kiss the eyes of the dead woman. Zemfira's father sits looking down in silence on the victims. The bodies are raised and the two young people are lowered into the cold earth. Aleko watches them and when the last handful of earth has been thrown over them, he slips from the tomb to the grass.

Then the old father spoke to him:

"Leave us, you proud man! We are only barbarians, who have no laws. With us there is no hangman, we never put anyone to death. But though we do not shed the blood of criminals, still we do not live with murderers. You are free, but you must live alone. Your voice would frighten us, for we are a timid and peaceful people and you, you are cruel and vindictive. Let us part here. Farewell, peace be with you."

After hearing which, the whole tribe left in great haste, hurrying away from this sinister spot. In a short time they disappeared on the distant steppe. Covered with a ragged carpet, but one wagon remained behind on the plain.

And so, as winter draws near with its first

cold mists one sees a noisy flight of birds going south, leaving behind one of their number fatally hurt, thus is Aleko left also. No fire burned that night, no one slept under the covers of the abandoned wagon.

## EPILOGUE.

And thus, in my clouded memory, can I recall the days of joy or sadness, of long ago. In these plains the terrible voice of warfare has loudly sounded. Here, the Russian has marked the frontier of Stamboul; there, the double-headed eagle hears the old glorious past related once more. And it was on this steppe, on these ruined entrenchments, that I met the wagons of the gypsies, the peaceful sons of liberty.

But happiness is not found even among you, poor children of nature, and, under your torn tents, there are dreams that are tortures. For you wanderers, not even the desert can shelter you against sorrow and crime. Passions are found everywhere, everywhere is implacable fate.

# THE HUSSAR

## *Le Hussard*

From the Russian of Pushkin

## THE HUSSAR

WITH his currycomb in hand, while grooming his horse, he muttered crossly below his breath:

"It is the devil himself who has given me this damn billet! Here they watch you as closely as if you were under sentence to be shot. They only give you cabbage soup, and as for liquor, well, there is no use expecting any—you can go and drink water.

"The master is like a tiger watching his prey, and the mistress . . . well, you just try to be attentive to her . . . and you'll see. Nothing has any effect on her, neither sentiment nor blows.

"Let me tell you about Kief! oh! that is a country for you! The pies just rain down on you, steaming hot; are you thirsty, why, here is the wine! And the women. . . Oh! the little rogues!

"Zounds! you would sell your soul for a look from one of those dark-eyed beauties. But they have one little fault, only one. . . . ."

"And what is it, tell me, soldier."

He pulled at his long mustache and said: "You blockhead, begging your pardon, you think you know it all, but you are a green-horn and you never saw what I saw.

"Then listen. Our regiment was camping on the Dnieper. My landlady was a pretty good soul and her husband was dead—don't forget that.

"We became great friends; we always agreed and life was very pleasant. When I beat her, Marousenka never even cried out.

"When I got drunk, she put me to bed, and gave me some onion soup. If I just made a sign: 'Eh, old lady . . .' the old lady never said no.

"There was no quarrelling with her and I could have been very happy, but what did I do but become jealous of her. It was foolish, no doubt, but for the life of me, I could not help it.

"'Why,' I said to myself, 'does she get up at cock's crow? Who comes for her? Is she untrue to me, or is it the devil who takes her away?'

"I began watching her. One night I went to bed and pretended to sleep. The night was dark and stormy, not fit for a dog to be out.

" I peeped at her. The old lady jumped out of bed softly and looked to see if I was asleep. I lay quiet, so she sat before the stove, and blowing on the red-hot coals, she lit a candle. She then went to a shelf in the corner and brought down a small bottle. After taking off every stitch of clothing, she sat on the broomstick, took three swallows from the bottle . . . and immediately flew up the chimney and was gone.

" ' Ha! ha!' I said on seeing this, ' and so the old lady is a witch? You just wait, my little dove.' I jumped out of bed and made for the bottle.

" It smelled bitter. I threw two drops on the floor and the shovel and a pail both flew up the chimney. I thought: ' Now this is great!'

" I looked under the bench and there slept the cat. A drop or two on his back—how he did swear—' Scat!' I said, and didn't the old cat follow the pail.

"After that, I sprinkled everything in sight, so much the worse for what I touched, and the saucepans, the seats and tables just galloped away up the chimney in the twinkling of an eye.

" ' The deuce,' I said, ' let us try it too.' I made one mouthful of the remaining liquid and . . . you can believe it or not as you like, in

a second I was up in the air, as light as a feather.

"I flew faster than the wind—I had no idea of where I might be going, and had barely time to call out: 'Look out!' to the stars, when suddenly I felt myself coming down.

"I looked about and found I was on a mountain. All around were boiling caldrons; there were songs and games, and shrill whistles besides. Dirty trick, by Jove! they were marrying a Jew to a toad.

"I sputtered and was trying to speak to them, when Marousenka came up to me:

"'Quick, get home. What brought you here, you good-for-nothing? They will roast you alive if they see you!'

"But I would not budge.

"'Home? and how in the devil can I find my way?'

"'Ah! you are joking, surely. Here take this broomstick, sit on it and git, you scoundrel.'

"'Me, me sit on a broomstick! me, the Emperor's Hussar! You old hag! Do you think I have sold myself to the devil? And for you to dare speak to me like this, have you more than one life to spare?'

"'A horse?—then here, stupid, here is a horse.'

"And sure enough, there stood a horse before me. He pawed the ground and was eager to be off, his neck arched and his tail up in the air.

"I got on his back; I looked for the reins, but there were none. He started and galloped away and in no time I found myself before our stove.

"I looked about, everything was in its place. I was astride, not a horse, but an old bench. . . . And such are the things that happen in those countries."

He pulled at his mustache and ended with: "You blockhead, begging your pardon, you think you know it all, but you are a green-horn and you never saw what I saw."

BOUND BY

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